

GNOSTICISM AND ECUMENISM: A DIALECTIC FOR A  
STEREO-POLYSCOPIC VIEW OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

### Gnosticism and Ecumenism: A Dialectic For A Stereo-PolyScopic View of Christian Unity

Frances Jo Mariposa

Between Gnosticism and Ecumenism is a relationship partly obscure. If explored, it stands to provide enlightenment for Christian unity. Part of this discussion involves the idea of a Stereo-Poly-Scopic view of Christian unity. We are many denominations of a long history of doctrinal struggle. We therefore bring a many numbered and diverse set of views to share in ecumenical discussion. The essence is dialogue--of sharing and listening to our diversities which promise to bring enrichment. "Stereo" is the idea of making firm, of providing structure in a setting yet open for the "Poly-Scopic"--the many views of various heritages. Ecumenical union of whatever nature it can be is not seen to be any easy task. The idea of many views providing some sense of a cohesive vision is even somewhat alien. Yet, just as the two different views that each of our eyes see are melded in the brain to provide a depth vision, so perhaps can all the diverse viewpoints we bring to ecumenical discussion. We have made a start with the Faith and Order document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) as the exploration of looking at our diverse and convergent doctrines. This present paper discusses each item in the title in turn: Gnosticism, Ecumenism, The Dialectic, Stereo-PolyScopic View, and Christian Unity with an epilogue on



personal reflections of the WCC Vancouver 1983 Assembly. We have talked of "return" to Rome. Eastern Orthodoxy would have us return to the Church of the first seven ecumenical councils of the early centuries. Perhaps we need to go back further than that--perhaps to a time preceeding the throwing out of the "first heresy" of Gnosticism, to a time when both were beginning, and perhaps even one, at a time now obscured by the fog of uncertainty like that fog of the Gospel of Truth; perhaps to a time when the fall-out of the Jewish-Roman War of 66-73 C.E. set many factors in motion, but which were obscured by the chaos following that war itself. At any rate, the new discoveries of texts, such as at Nag Hammadi, offer us a vision into such a time for the challenge of ecumenism and the task before us.

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## PREFACE

### Vision of the Gnostic Report

The early natal stages of this paper occurred without notice, as most early natal stages do, during a Religious Studies class on Eastern Orthodox Tradition I took as an unclassified graduate at San Diego State. In my term paper entitled, "Eastern Orthodox Tradition and Ecumenism," I found myself relating how the study of Eastern Orthodox Tradition had opened my viewpoint so that I found myself involved in my own lost religious heritage--my past, even--that I had been denied by the events of religious history. My discovery was like waking out of amnesia.

In the paper I went on to relate how perhaps the Ecumenical Movement might need to go back and reclaim, or at least look at again, the pieces of ourselves we have cast away and at the "heresies" we thought we were getting rid of--even Arianism, and Docetism, even the "first heresy," Gnosticism.

For, indeed, the Church itself greatly resembles a victim of amnesia with a forgotten past.

For who are we who are The Church? We splintered into hundreds of pieces via the Reformation. We cut ourselves in half in 1054 C.E. We lost part of ourselves, the Coptics, at Chalcedon. We threw some of us out with the Nestorians. We lost a piece of us

with the Arians. And with the Docetists. And with the Gnostics. We have been like the scarecrow in the "Wizard of Oz" when he lost pieces of his straw body. Instead of being, in the spirit of Pope John XXIII, the "separated brethren," are not all of us the "scattered brethren" (or, more updated, the "scattered siblings")?

As I finished my term paper in Eastern Orthodox Tradition, I decided to try my own advice and to take on Gnosticism as a special study. By doing so, I hoped to test my own hypothesis.

This paper is an abstract of my research.

Ecumenism is a term that engenders the deepest hopes, dreams, and loves. We long for a time when Christian divisions will become apertures to resolve the ancient disagreements, when the ancient visions of brotherhood will be lived out by the followers of Jesus Christ.

Surrealistically, in keeping with my resolve from my term paper, I entertain fantasy fashion, my own dream in which I envision a great Ecumenical Conference in, perhaps, Ankara, the heartland of Paul's old stamping grounds. In a spirit of freedom and mutual trust, there are those of us who have come to share our concerns for Christian unity. We meet around a huge table to discover whether perhaps the Holy Spirit was the author of our divisions in the first place by setting us to individual tasks early in Christian history much as the chairperson of a committee sends out sub-committees to deal with various data and then report back later on. At any rate, here at Ankara, we have returned to give our reports.

As we come together we bring a stereo-polyscopic view of our Christian heritage. Just as each eye brings a slightly different picture which the brain combines with the picture brought by the other eye in order to see in depth, we all are organs of vision for the Holy Spirit. Or again, just as the blind men examining an elephant could have mutually shared their own individual perceptions, and thus could have "seen" the elephant better, instead of merely disagreeing, so we have come to Ankara, each with a piece of truth for a larger Truth.

We come: not just Protestants and Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox; but also Mormons and Christian Scientists, Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, Charismatics and Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Reformists, Traditionalists and Christian Marxists. We come: Coptics, Nestorians, Sabellians, Arians, and Athanasians, Donatists and Docetists and Gnostics.

We come to discover a unity that has only seemed to have dissolved, yet to achieve a unity never quite realized, like a picture in a jig-saw puzzle that emerges quantumly as the pieces fit together. We come to see with all our eyes and to complete the pictures of each other. In this stereo-polyscopic setting, each report given is like a lens illumining all the others.

This paper, then, is like one of those lenses--for in my dream I bring The Gnostic Report.

## CHAPTER 1

## Introduction: The Need For a New View

"Out of the mists of the beginning of our era there looms a pageant of mythical figures whose vast, superhuman contours might people the walls and ceiling of another Sistine Chapel," wrote Hans Jonas in The Gnostic Religion. He then cited those figures: the blessed Aeons, the wandering Sophia, the arrogant Creator who believes himself to be the Most High, the Soul trapped in the dark labyrinth of the world, the terrible Archons keeping the gates of the cosmic prison of that world, and the Savior from the Light who comes to the darkness to open a path back to that Light. "The tale," said Hans Jonas, "has found no Michelangelo . . . no Dante and no Milton," to give it form.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the Gnostics themselves may have provided us with their own Dantes and Miltons. For in December, 1945 C.E., thirteen Gnostic codices were found in a jar at the Nile Valley cliffs near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. Since the time when Jonas wrote his book (first edition, 1958), these codices have been more thoroughly examined and translated. Estimated by James Robinson, New Testament scholar, to have been hidden for safe-keeping within the jar at around 400 C.E., these codices are so diverse in manner that it is

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1963), xiii.

difficult to account for what they all had in common that caused them to be collected together. Indeed, James Robinson believes they may have come from three smaller libraries.<sup>2</sup> In any case, the question does emerge as to who these people were who packed away their books thusly, and against what impending events, from whom we hear after these 1600 years.

The question also emerges that John Dart, religious writer for The Los Angeles Times, addressed in his book, The Laughing Savior: "But can today's Christian culture find any value in the writings of so-called heretics?" he asked in reference to the Nag Hammadi codices.<sup>3</sup>

This report, therefore, is an attempt, to state in the affirmative that Gnostic writings do indeed have value for present day Christian culture, and on the parish level; indeed, one such area is that of Ecumenical discussion.

For, counterpoised with Dart's question, is an observation by Robinson that "religion must come to a new way of looking at itself in Western civilization."<sup>4</sup> This observation, which, though taken out of exact context, can be applied to the issue of ecumenism. We must somehow come to look at ourselves in a new and different way than we have before. But looking, and seeing, so simply stated

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<sup>2</sup> James M. Robinson, ed., The Nag Hammadi Library (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), ix-25.

<sup>3</sup> John Dart, The Laughing Savior (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), xv.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Robinson, quoted in Faculty Guide, School of Theology at Claremont, Ca., n.d.



by Robinson's words, are not so simply done. Any kind of seeing is, at best, a most complex exchange of energy. Some kinds of sight are aided by lenses--such as in telescopes, microscopes, eye glasses, and cameras. Might not a lens be useful also in the looking, and seeing, that western religion is called to do?

Herein submitted, then, is the thesis that Gnosticism can be such a lens.

But it is not that Gnosticism offers some hitherto unknown kind of illumination that will suddenly light up and finally solve the problem. It is rather, as in holographic photography, that Gnosticism brings its own special perspective of the whole which, when added to the perspectives of the other parts, promotes completion to them and thus adds depth. Any group included in ecumenical discussion--United Methodism, United Presbyterianism, Unitarianism or Mormonism--would therefore be such a lens and could be discussed from that standpoint. This report is the Gnostic lens.

Therefore, at further issue--and since "lens" is now part of the language of this report--a finer focusing for the special perspective brought by Gnosticism is needed. At the heart of the matter must be the reasons that Gnosticism should even be a part of ecumenical discussion in the first place.

These potentials present themselves:

1. Christian faith is operating out of a faulty sense of its own doctrinal history, and part of that history is Gnostic.
2. Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christian faith are highly Gnostic.
3. Gnosticism offers a commonality worthy of ecumenical

attention.

4. Such texts as those from Nag Hammadi are of potential aid in the tasks involved.

5. The implications are relevant to all levels of Church being from The World Council of Churches to the very most grass roots levels of parish life.

The job of a lens is to focus diverse rays of light, to pull them in, and provide an image from them. Similarly, this report has the job of focusing a diverse manner of material. The major references include: The Nag Hammadi Library, edited by James Robinson, which provides (in English) translations of all thirteen codices; The Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; Panarion by Epiphanius (unpublished translation by Francis Williams); The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, Vol. I and II, edited by Bentley Layton; Eerdmans' Handbook to The History of Christianity, Tim Dowley, organizing editor; The Orthodox Church by Timothy Ware; A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948, edited by R. Rouse and S.C. Neill; as well as additional sources on church history, ecumenism, church councils, and Gnosticism.

The title of this report is: "Gnosticism and Ecumenism: A Dialectic For A Stereo-PolyScopic View of Christian Unity." It was the hardest part of the report to formulate since it contains in a kind of coded mini-form the essence of the report itself. The chapters simply move along the units of the title to what we all hope is an astounding and succinct conclusion.

The effort of this introductory chapter is to state that a need for a new view of Christian faith for unity exists and that

Gnosticism offers a lens to facilitate such a view.

Chapter 2 deals with the rubric of Gnosticism. A major problem with any discussion of Gnosticism is to define exactly what it is. There existed Hellenistic Gnosticism, Jewish Gnosticism, and Christian Gnosticism. The relationships among these are not clear for us today. Usually when Gnosticism is referred to, it means the "Gnostic heresy" of the second century C.E. against which the church fathers wrote. "Certain men," said Irenaeus, "rejecting the truth, are introducing among us false stories and vain genealogies. . ."<sup>5</sup> Yet, as James Robinson states, our most basic stance "has until now been known almost exclusively through the myopic view of heresy hunters who often quote only to refute or ridicule."<sup>6</sup> And Walter Bauer, German New Testament scholar, pointed out that "The use to which the literature of the century or so after the close of the apostolic age was put in one way or another in the disputes within Christianity, may still be subject to an examination that will provide information in a different direction." He goes on to explain that all parties made use of literature: "Both orthodox and heretic alike seek, by means of literature of all kinds . . . to extend their influence at home and abroad and to obstruct the path of their opponents. . ." and to even "edit" works of the opponents themselves to advance their own causes.<sup>7</sup> "Thus," says

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<sup>5</sup> Cyril C. Richardson, ed., Early Christian Fathers, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 358.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, The Nag Hammadi Library, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 169-176.

Robinson, "the coming to light of the Nag Hammadi library gives unexpected access to the Gnostic stance as Gnostics themselves presented it. It provides new roots for the uprooted." <sup>8</sup> The Messina Colloquium developed its "Messina Definition" in 1966. Chapter 2, therefore, works at defining Gnosticism and states some implications thereof.

Chapter 3 addresses Ecumenism, a word that is related to the Greek oikos (house) from a root that also gives us ecology and economy.

Ecumenism itself is, however, as complex and hard to define as Gnosticism. For Ecumenism is to be distinguished from "The Ecumenical Movement." To be considered are the Ecumenical Councils, of which the Roman Catholic Church recognizes twenty-one, starting with Nicaea I and ending with Vatican II. The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 is considered the prototype of all church councils. There were Pre-Nicaean church councils, such as the one in 190 C.E. concerning the Easter date controversy. There have been the Protestant councils, which must include a discussion of the Council of Trent (the nineteenth Ecumenical Council by Roman Catholic counting), the missionary movement of the nineteenth century which led to the formation of the International Missionary Council in 1910 in Edinburgh which in turn resulted in the Faith and Order as well as the Life and Work conferences which gave rise in turn to the formation of The World Council of Churches in 1948 which had its sixth meeting in Vancouver, Canada in 1983. There must be considered the Eastern

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<sup>8</sup> Robinson, Nag Hammadi Library, 3.

Orthodox and Coptic dimensions of Christian faith, both as they relate to The World Council of Churches and as they do not. Considered also is COCU.

Chapter 4, therefore, sets up a dialectic between Gnosticism and Ecumenism. But there are many cross-points along this dialectic. "Dialectic" is defined as basically presenting juxtaposed viewpoints in the effort to contrast and compare, and thus illumine each side, in the further effort to arrive at an additional viewpoint made up of elements of the primary ones. A dialectic between Gnosticism and Ecumenism is to discuss past and present. And traversing that dialectic of past and present is a kind of sigma-line trajectory that arcs back and forth between primitive Christianity and Gnosticism, between orthodoxy and heresy, between doctrine and confession, between apostolic beginnings and modern church life, that in its arcing is yet shrouded ghost-like with the thickened mist of the Gnostic Gospel of Truth. Nevertheless, Gnosticism and Ecumenism can be seen to be related along several polarities. The casting out of the Gnostics from orthodoxy was the beginning of the need for present day Ecumenism. For we have by now done so much casting out, we would like to do some gathering in. The syncretistic character of Gnosticism that the church fathers felt threatened to mix the early church with foreign elements would now be a little more appreciated because we would like to be a little more syncretic, at least as far as the "scandal of demoninations" haunts us today.

But in addition, Gnosticism itself lives on in today's orthodox traditions, not just in peripheral sects, but in mainline

orthodoxy itself--such as in our Augustinian heritage; for though he rejected Gnostic Manichaeism, Augustine retained his Neo-Platonism which remained related to Gnostic tenets. Further, there is need to reopen the debate shut down 1600 years ago when the Nag Hammadi codices were buried and let them speak to us in today's ecumenical setting. For the texts from Nag Hammadi tap us back into an important part of our history.

Chapter 5 views the implications of this dialectic. The term "Stereo-PolyScopic View"--a phrase admittedly put together from "stereoscopic," meaning a view with a three dimensional character by two slightly different pictures visually by way of an instrument called a stereoscope, also the kind of view produced by the two eyes which by seeing slightly different views that are combined in the brain in turn into depth perception; from stereo meaning the firming or making solid of some aspect, thus stereophonic, and stereotype; and from poly meaning many such as in polyphonic or polychromatic--presents "polyscopic" which does not exist as a word, for to consider "many views" in the way this term suggests is not an idea solidified at present, it would seem. Yet what is implied here is the possibility of a kind of seeing produced from many viewpoints and made solid in a manner of perception. A hologramic television image, if such were presently in existence, might be a possible comparison. Such an image would need a large number of cameras on many sides of the person or object to be transmitted. At the point of reception, an image from all those cameras would need to be produced from a great diversity of transmitting perspectives. Instead of trying to be "cute" and "making up" a term, this is an attempt

to be precise in transmitting a concept for which I was unable otherwise to discover language.

"Stereo-PolyScopic" here suggests with all the diverse views produced by Christian denominations and sects there could be such a view of Christian unity. Each denominational viewpoint could be like a lens illumining all the others. The dialectic between Gnosticism and Ecumenism would be one aspect of that Stereo-PolyScopic view. But further, all the viewpoints would be needed; it would not work without all the lenses working together. For in holographic photography the loss of any part of the whole picture results in the loss of depth and definition. For, though the whole is very validly known to be greater than the sum of its parts, that whole does not exist without those parts. And the argument herein that is overriding is that the Gnostic lens is needed not only to bring its vital material as such--but more, to help us see what it is that we are already trying to see.

The closest any writer has come to talking of such a viewpoint is Jacqueline McMakin who wrote in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies in 1976 to point to the need of grassroots people, theologians, and church hierarchy to work together by saying:

The teaching of Acts is that often the vision for direction or action resides in pairs or groups of people (Peter and Cornelius, Paul and Anaias, the Pentecost gathering). How exciting if members of each group sought the vision of people in other groups to complete their own vision.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jacqueline McMakin, "Needed: An Ecumenism of Effort Toward Christian Unity," Journal of Ecumenical Studies 13, no. 1 (Winter 1976): 99-102.

To complete their own vision! If for grassroots, theologians, and hierarchy, why not across denominational lines also?

The implications could be felt all across the church from the leadership of The World Council of Churches to the parish levels in all confessions. Influenced would be worship, doctrine, and views of Biblical interpretations. If allowed to be inspired by the resources contained in the Nag Hammadi texts, Chapter 5 argues, this emerging view could, as an apex of possibility, sweep the entire church into a rebirth.

Chapter 6, therefore, deals with the issue of Christian unity itself as a kind of conclusion to the report. Hardly anyone would argue against the need for Christian unity. But the need is more than simply that it is a nice idea. It is urgent. We seem to have begun our Christian history quarreling as well as loving. Judas betrayed Christ. Peter denied him. Paul and Peter disagreed. The church fathers found no end of items to dispute. And as endless numbers of church councils have proved, our ability is great as Christians to discuss and dispute through twenty centuries. Do we really want yet another conference such as I envision in my preface?

But our divisions prevent our working and worshipping together as Christians, and give rise to other issues--we end up as Christians oppressing other Christians across the lines of racial, cultural, sexual, national, and economic groups. We forget our heritage as stewards in our destruction of the earth itself by ecological damage and warfare.

Our divisions can work another way. Like the diverse cells



of a body that give that body life, the diverse functions of an organism that allow it to function, (Paul said we are all part of one body, the Body of Christ), the diverse views of and from our faith as Christians can allow richness, allow "global consciousness," allow a "Stereo-PolyScopic" view for Christian Unity!

Finally, I include an Epilogue with Reflections based on my visit to the Sixth Assembly of The World Council of Churches in Vancouver, Canada, in July-August 1983. In Vancouver I tried to reflect on whether what I had drawn up for Chapters 1-6 of this paper might indeed be workable.

A few words might be said regarding the actual workings of the paper itself. I have learned that my form of writing, and therefore my form of thinking, is given to what many have called "rambling" or "circular," or scattered or unfocused. This means I do not write, or think, as part of it, in an outline form. Now then, I would indeed like to believe I think more like an artist who sketches in, then fills out here and there, highlighting here and there, jumping over the canvas in the attempt to draw out a complete picture with mere spots of pigment. Or a weaver who shuttles back and forth with the thread, building layer by layer what will only emerge at the last instant. Ah, well. However, since this is about the stereo-polyscopic, it is appropriate to swing around the subject like the making of modern movies where the camera circles the performers, now seeing them from the back, now the front, now from above. So this paper moves in circles and back and forth in order to discuss what is under discussion from many angles.

## CHAPTER 2

### Gnosticism

The initial effort in this paper is to define Gnosticism in a workable way. My argument is that Gnosticism and Ecumenism engage in a dialectic that has oscillated like a sigma-line (or sine-wave) through Christian history that bears, and bares, a relationship to Christian unity.

Thus, if Gnosticism is not adequately defined so as to be workable throughout this paper, the whole line of discussion will not hold up.

Yet, it is not easy to define Gnosticism. Our knowledge of Gnosticism is at best scanty, as well as biased, even with the rich find at Nag Hammadi, because the Gnostics had as their most prevailing characteristic that of being "secret"--arcane--and anything we know of them is very little indeed.

Messina made an attempt. During April 13-18, 1966, a Colloquio on Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo held in Messina, Italy, defined Gnosticism with what has ever since been called the "Messina Definition." As an effort to avoid "undifferentiated" use of the terms gnosis and Gnosticism, the latter was limited to:

1. Those certain systems of the Second Century C.E. which regarded themselves as elite in the knowledge, gnosis, of divine mysteries about which:
2. A "working hypothesis" would include: (a) a fallen spark

in each person that needs to be awakened and reintegrated by a divine counterpart in which the setting is a dual concept upon a monistic background where, (b) this reintegration is conditioned by a divine self-knowledge which is itself known by the gnosis which needs to be awakened, but which is different from the revelation-traditions with their self-knowledge or self actualizations in the Biblical and Islamic traditions and further, (c) these systems of Gnosticism are different from the proto-Gnosticism and pre-Gnosticism traditions prior to or operating in the Second Century C.E. which may nonetheless have given rise to the "classical" Gnosticism of the Second Century under discussion as well as, (d) being different from the Gnostic-like systems of other religions of more Monistic type and, (e) limiting discussion of the "dualism" found in Gnosticism to those of anti-cosmic, cosmic, and metaphysical categories.<sup>1</sup>

This definition I consider to be inadequate since:

1. There were in fact too many "systems" of too much diversity to be put under one rubric.
2. No clear-cut lines existed as to what was Proto-and/or-Pre-Gnosticism and what was full-blown "classical" Gnosticism. In spite of the Messina need, and rightly so, to avoid undifferentiations, in actual reality, those undifferentiations existed.
3. We are handicapped by a minimum amount of witness from the "gnostics" even with the find of codices at Nag Hammadi.
4. Indeed, such material as we have had for some nineteen

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<sup>1</sup> Ugo Bianchi, ed., Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo (Leiden: Brill, 1967), xxvi-xxix.

centuries, mostly the writings of the church fathers, has been so biased that we are still "brain-washed" so that the Nag Hammadi material still has not, in my opinion, really broken through with its own message. Even our critical readings of the Nag Hammadi material are colored, I believe, by the writings of the church fathers.

5. We seem to have suffered from a manner of amnesia. Like some "black hole" that pulls in its own light, Christian history in the years during and following the Jewish-Roman War of 66-73 C.E. displays a definite gap. Those years must have been so traumatic as to be lost in collective memory. Yet they were years vastly important, perhaps more important than we have considered, in the early histories of Christianity and Gnosticism.

6. Christianity itself is not, in spite of what we might think offhandedly, so easy to define, especially and/or when set over against Gnosticism.

The problem for this chapter can be seen right away. It is to talk for the next several pages about a subject about which there is very little information by which to do that talking. Nevertheless, some things can indeed be said.

I want to work backward up through the six points just listed.

To begin with, in considering point 6, the sub-theme of this paper could be seen to be, "In Search of a Definition of Christian Faith." With over four main groups of Christians--Roman Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and diverse sects that some do not even consider Christian in the first place--it can be seen there is a certain lack of mutuality in Christian definition. Such a search

is the root cause for this paper and will be referred to again and again here.

Elaine Pagels, Princeton New Testament scholar, has written that "The term 'Christianity,' especially since the Reformation, has covered an astonishing range of groups." Such diversity, Pagels continues, ranges in the twentieth century from a "Catholic cardinal in the Vatican to an African Methodist Episcopal preacher initiating revival in Detroit, a Mormon missionary in Thailand, or the member of a village church on the coast of Greece." Yet, says Pagels, Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants all feel that the present diversity is a recent, as well as deplorable, condition. They all feel the early church was a purer, simpler, faith with members sharing even their money and property as they worshipped and believed in the same ways. Only after the "golden age" did the conflicts caused by heretics emerge. Yet, says Pagels, the discoveries at Nag Hammadi have reversed former notions. If the Nag Hammadi codices contain early forms of Christianity, we will have to recognize that early Christianity was far more diverse than we have suspected.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the legend of the "pure primitive faith" of early Christians does not need the Nag Hammadi codices to dispel it. The Bible itself carries a record of dissent. The disciples of Jesus were not a model of unity. The great legend of the Twelve was traumatized by the death of Judas (by his own hand) and needed an election to

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<sup>2</sup> Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York: Vintage, 1981), xxii-xxiii.

replace him. Peter, who denied Jesus before the crucifixion, was not the model of consistency after the resurrection. Paul was at odds with just about everyone in sight from Barnabas (who had stood up for him in Jerusalem), Peter, the church headquarters in Jerusalem, and through his many letters on various subjects, with the churches he had founded among the Gentiles. The Book of Revelation does not give an overall positive report of the churches of Asia Minor. Yet we cling to the belief that somehow the early church had had its "act together" until those nasty heretics like the Gnostics tried to get it to go astray.

The New Testament itself is not an exact gauge for what very early Christianity was or was not. To try to discern early Christianity of the first, second, and third centuries C.E. through investigating the New Testament offers so many biases that the job is almost futile from that stance. For, most of all, the New Testament reflects the nature of the Church of Post-Constantine times in that, here, the religious philosophy and political philosophy must have had to be in harmony with any religious texts that were acceptable. Therefore, I would hypothesize that much can be said about Post-Constantine conditions from the New Testament, but very little about Pre-Constantine times. The earliest we can go back in our investigation of early Christianity on the basis of the New Testament is that of the fourth or fifth century Christianity.

I make this hypothesis because we in fact know very little about the early centuries--so little that it may be questioned as to how can we even know how exactly and how fully New Testament writings do report on the times and places and people involved.

And we know that much that could inform us additionally was suppressed. Much that Nag Hammadi reports to us was unknown until the mid-twentieth century.

We have to ask how much Nag Hammadi can tell us about the first, second, and third centuries.

And we have to revise our historical estimation of Christian Faith which has been seen as a steady progress as Jesus gathered twelve disciples (the Synoptic Gospels name and number them--John does not) who traveled with him for the duration of his public ministry (which is variously estimated to have been from six months to three years) to whom he appeared after his resurrection to instruct them to spread the Gospel to all the world in ever widening circles with Paul carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Point 5 above addresses one reason we must change our estimation of Christian history in that some of it is sitting in the "black hole" of forgetfulness where we have forgotten what happened during the Jewish-Roman War of 66-73 C.E. Here indeed is another subject we know little about. Josephus is almost our only source. Without his somewhat semi-reliable reports, we would have practically none at all.

The New Testament does not seem to speak of the Jewish-Roman War, which would logically be the case if indeed all the books of the New Testament were written prior to that war. However, while most scholars feel that apart from Paul's letters, the New Testament books were written after the war, an interesting variation is offered by J. Massyngberde Ford and is discussed below. Perhaps the New Testament does speak of the war without our really knowing it. For

instance, why does Revelation speak of New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2) unless the Old Jerusalem is no more? Or, why does Luke speak of a "bank" being put around Jerusalem (Luke 19:43), a common enough war practice? Yet, we know from Josephus that Titus indeed built a wall around Jerusalem in 70 C.E. in order to prevent people from leaving or entering the city, thus starving them into surrender.<sup>3</sup>

What of the Christians in Jerusalem, which was, after all, the Christian headquarters? Many of them fled up the Jordan Valley to Pella after the first stage of the war before Vespasian came to Palestine. At the same time, many Pharisees went to Jamnia.<sup>4</sup> Do we ever hear from those Pellasian Christians again? It is unclear. Did they spread from Pella to Syria or elsewhere? Were they the first Gnostics? Did they write Matthew? They seemed to have disappeared. Christian Faith after the war apparently consisted of Paul's outer shell of Gentile missions that were left after the collapse of the Jerusalem center.

The church fathers do not seem to speak of the Jewish-Roman War. This is not unusual--for, after all, the war was long over. Most of the church fathers were Roman with a different perspective than if they had been Jewish.

Harry Thomas Frank wrote in Discovering the Biblical World:

As for the mainstream of Christianity, its course had leapt clear of Jerusalem by the year 44, although strong

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<sup>3</sup> Josephus, The Jewish War, trans. G. A. Williamson (Middlesex: Penguin, 1959), 197.

<sup>4</sup> Harry Thomas Frank, Discovering the Biblical World (Maplewood, NJ: Hammond, 1975), 258-260.



ties were maintained for a few years after that. For the most part, however, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 passed unnoticed in Christian literature except insofar as it determined a certain character which the writings took in their attempts to dissociate themselves from the rebellious Jews. Those Jerusalem Jewish Christians who fled the city about the same time as the Pharisees returned after the war only to fall victim--as Jews, not Christians--during an outbreak in 109. Eventually Jewish Christianity died out altogether and a later Christian council condemned these people (who came to be known as Ebionites, "Poor") as heretics because they did not place proper emphasis on the divinity of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

The Jewish community of Judea and the Christians among them suffered two wars within three generations. The Christian faith that developed and radiated out of Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, and other centers, was the Christianity that developed an orthodoxy, a canon (The New Testament), creeds like the Nicene and Apostles creeds, and a hierarchy.<sup>6</sup> Or did it happen that way or another?

The fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was a caldron of chaos that had to have had a great influence on both Christianity and Gnosticism. That influence is a most unknown variable.

Regarding Revelation: J. Massynberde Ford, in her commentary in the Anchor Bible, points out Revelation barely made it into the Christian canon. She believes chapters 4-11 to have been composed by followers of John the Baptist. Chapters 12-22 is a section she theorizes was composed at a later date than the first section also by followers of John the Baptist, who may or may not have been converted to the Christian faith. The attitude of chapters 12-22 may

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 275-276.

have also been shared by Qumran, John the Baptist himself, and by the primitive Jerusalem church which was led by James, called the "brother of the Lord." Chapters 1-3, along with 22:16a, 20b, and 21, Ford believes, were added by a Jewish Christian. She believes chapters 4-11 in oral form belongs to the ministry of John the Baptist and therefore prior to Jesus' public ministry. Chapters 12-22 belong to the mid 60s as the war began. Chapters 1-3 and the portions of 22 belong to after the time of the war. Thus the whole composition of chapters 4-22 with some additions in the final chapter comprised an apocalypse of an entirely Jewish and/or Jewish Christian work.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Revelation might be a Jewish apocalypse redacted by Christians.<sup>8</sup>

Ford's conclusion is that Revelation is from the "Baptist School" which was a primitive form of early Christianity, a community in competition with the young church, and mainly written prior to Matthew.<sup>9</sup>

If so, a different understanding of Christian Faith is in order. New questions must be asked about connections among Christians, Essenes, Zealots, and Gnostics.

In 68-69 C.E. Qumran had been destroyed by Vespasian's drive

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<sup>7</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, Revelation, vol. 38 of The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 56.

through the Jordan Valley with the Tenth Legion.<sup>10</sup> Were Christians at Pella, also in the Jordan Valley on a direct route, spared in that activity? Josephus sees all the people in this general area as Jewish.<sup>11</sup> It seems safe to say that many Christians were killed at that time.

Questions that emerge in this discussion are:

1. Can we say we have an adequate hold on a view of early Christian history so long as we are "in the dark" as to how the Jewish-Roman War acted in the beginning of that history?

2. Are there indeed clues in the Bible about that war?<sup>12</sup>

3. What were the Christians of Jerusalem and Pella and elsewhere doing during this time?

4. Was this the time when a Jewish/Christian movement, perhaps connected with John the Baptist and/or the Essenes, became splintered to emerge later on in factions opposing each other?

5. How did the Second Century Jewish rebellions influence the development of Christianity? As stated above, Christians returned

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<sup>10</sup> Frank, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Josephus, 246-248.

<sup>12</sup> For example, S. MacLean Gilmour writes in The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 8 (New York and Nashville: Abington, 1952) about Luke 19:41-45: "In the judgment of many interpreters a 'prophecy after the event.' The whole passage may be editorial. Early in the siege of Jerusalem, Titus threw up some sort of earthworks around the city and surmounted the 'banks' with timber in the hope of cutting off supplies and of starving the defenders into submission (Josephus Jewish War v.6.2.). When this barrier proved inadequate, it was supplemented by a stone wall. (ibid., v. 12, 1-2)," 339-340. The argument could go either way.

to Jerusalem and were persecuted as Jews in 109. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that "many scholars date the break between Christianity and Judaism to the event of the final fall of Jerusalem in 135 C.E. after which Jews were barred from coming into Jerusalem but Christians could come and go at will." <sup>13</sup>

6. Did Gnosticism develop out of a Jewish Christian strand that eventually all but died out leaving the open field to "orthodoxy" except scattered groups such as the Mandeans of today who follow John the Baptist?

7. Is the Book of Revelation a piece of text out of that development?

8. What connections were there among Jews, Christians, Jewish Christians, Essenes, John the Baptist, Gnostics, Qumran, and the Jewish-Roman War?

These questions cannot now be answered. But they need to be held in abeyance as a definition of Gnosticism is pursued.

Adolph Harnack many years ago pointed to the "gap" of about forty years from 61 C.E. to the beginning of the reign of Trajan-- a period containing the years of the Jewish-Roman War and its aftermath. Harnack wrote:

We possess probably not a few writings which belong to that period; but how are we to prove this? How are they to be arranged? Here lies the cause of most of the differences, combinations and uncertainties; many scholars therefore, actually leave these 40 years out of account, and seek to place everything in the first three decennia of the second century! <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Jews," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed.

<sup>14</sup> Adolph Harnack, History of Dogma, vol. 1 (New York: Dover, 1961), 144.

Harnack wrote long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the hiding of which was during that 40 years.

Jean Danielou, in The Theology of Jewish Christianity, wrote:

Three worlds went to the making of the Christian Church, three cultures, three visions and expressions of truth--the Jewish, the Hellenistic and the Latin; and each of them produced its own distinctive Theology. <sup>15</sup>

Danielou pointed out also the void in our knowledge of the first and second centuries. A breakthrough, he said, came in the years following 1946 when the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices were found. These changed our picture of the early church and put us more in touch with Jewish Christianity, a rubric that Danielou said had no place in Harnack's writings because Harnack had no suspicion of its existence. <sup>16</sup>

Was it our roots in Jewish Christianity we lost in the Jewish-Roman War? Danielou says that all the ancient writers claimed that the origins of the Gnostic movement in Christian Faith were connected to Jewish gnosis. <sup>17</sup>

Is this Jewish/Christian/Gnostic nature of our beginnings something we can reclaim out of the "black hole" of forgetfulness of the gap/void/chaos of the late-first and early-second centuries? We will keep our eyes on them during the rest of the paper.

To get to point 4 above, the writings of the church fathers

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<sup>15</sup> Jean Danielou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 69.

must be briefly examined: namely, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertul-  
lian, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius.

What did the church fathers say?

Justin Martyr, the apologist church father, born about 114 C.E. in Samaria, "Flavia Neopolis in Palestine," as he put it, (actually modern Nablous) wrote a petition to complain about the empire's treatment of Christians to Emperor Titus Aelius Adrianus Antonius Pius Augustus Caesar. He was well educated in the religions and philosophies of the Roman Empire and had decided on joining the Christian faith after a careful and exhaustive study of all of them. He complains that Christians are good people who are punished simply for being Christians while other people who worship animals and idols are not punished and may, in fact, do more evil things than the Christians. And he asks the emperor to put this to rights.<sup>18</sup>

Justin cites certain men who were possessed by "devils"--yet not only were they not persecuted by Rome, they were even treated as worthy of honors. Simon of Samaria, says Justin, is one such man. Simon was honored as a god with a statue in Rome (a fact many scholars doubt), he worked magic, he took with him a former prostitute called Helena; and one of his disciples by the name of Menander deceived many people in Antioch with magic of his own as well as persuading many who heard him that they would never die.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 160-171.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 171.

Justin cites one Marcion of Pontus who taught people to believe in "some other god greater than the Creator." And likewise this Marcion preached another Son of God than Christ whom the prophets had foretold.<sup>20</sup> The people, complains Justin, who follow Simon and Marcion are also called Christians--he is not sure whether they do such things as all Christians are accused of, such as upsetting the lamp, promiscuous intercourse, eating human flesh--but those other Christians are not persecuted by Rome as are the Christians with whom Justin is associated.<sup>21</sup> Justin therefore asks the emperor and his people to learn of the truth and be not entangled by Simon's teachings and please will he destroy Simon's statue.<sup>22</sup> At the end of his second book, an apology more to Romans in general than to the Emperor, Justin cites how he despises the "wicked and deceitful doctrines of Simon of" his, that is, Justin's, "own nation."<sup>23</sup>

In his "Dialogue with Trypho the Jew," Justin discusses the many people who come forth in Jesus' name, but speaking and acting in impious and blasphemous ways, thus indicating they are the wolves in sheep's clothing Jesus warned against. He cites these people as Marcians, Valentinians, Basilidians, Saturnitians, among others, who take their names from those philosophers they immediately follow.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 171, 182.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 171-172.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 212.

Justin Martyr's comments that there are other Christians are interesting. Indeed, it would seem that many diverse groups were in existence, all claiming to be Christians, all claiming to be the "true" Christians, and differing from each other on finer (and sometimes, not so fine) points of interpretation. And it looks like some group or groups out of all of these groups "made good."

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons from about 177 C.E. was born probably in Asia Minor between 120 and 140 C.E. and lived perhaps to 202. He wrote strongly against the Gnostics in five books called Against Heresies (Adversus Haereses) written to "my dear friend."<sup>25</sup> In the Greek this "dear friend" is Agapete, ἀγαπῆτε.<sup>26</sup> Vocative in form, ἀγαπῆτε, perhaps better translated "be loved"--a command, yet similar to "beloved"--can remind us of Theophilus to whom Luke wrote. Agapete is mentioned here because the discussion later on Hippolytus has reference to a possible tie between Irenaeus and Hippolytus.

Irenaeus wrote:

Inasmuch as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies, which, as the apostle says, "minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith," and by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the mind of the inexperienced and take them captive. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Irenaeus, therefore, feels constrained, he tells ἀγαπῆτε, to

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<sup>25</sup>Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, 309-315.

<sup>26</sup>W. Wigan Harvey, ed., Sancti Irenaei, vol. 1 (Cantabrigiae: Academicis, 1857; reprint, Ridgewood, NJ: Greg Press, 1965), 80, 162.

<sup>27</sup>Roberts and Donaldson, 315.



expose these men for the evil ones they are. Among the deceitful teachings those men have is the blasphamy of the Demiurge. Irenaeus has read the Commentaries of the disciples of Valentinus and has even made personal contact with them in order to research out just what it is they teach. Thus he sets out to explain and expose it all.<sup>28</sup> Would that we had those Commentaries he was so fortunate as to be able to consult!

Maybe we have some of them from Nag Hammadi.

Referring to disciples of Ptolemaeus, whose school he sees as a "bud from that of Valentinus," Irenaeus explains their belief in things. There is a perfect and pre-existent Aeon called Proarche, Propater, and Bythus. With this pre-existent Aeon was Ennoea, called Charis and Sige. This Bythus decided to send from himself the beginning of all things. With Sige, Bythus produced Nous, called Monogenes, and Aletheia. These four constituted the first Pythagorean Tetrad. Monogenes then produced from himself Logos and Zoe. Logos and Zoe produced Anthropos and Ecclesia. Thus there was the first begotten Ogdoad: namely, Bythus, Nous, Logos, and Anthropos along with their counterparts of Ennoea, Aletheia, Zoe, and Ecclesia. Logos and Zoe then produced ten Aeons: namely, Bythus with Mixis, Ageratos with Henosis, Autophyes with Hedone, Acinetos with Syncrasis, and Monogenes with Macaria. Anthropos and Ecclesia produced twelve Aeons: namely, Paracletus with Pistis, Patricos with Elpis, Metricos with Agape, Ainos with Synesis, Ecclesiasticus with Macariotes, and Theletos with Sophia. These thirty Aeons made

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

the Pleroma which was seen to be tripartite--by being divided into an Ogdoad, a Decad, and a Duodecad.<sup>29</sup> (See Plate I.)

The youngest of the Duodecad, namely Sophia, caused all the trouble by wishing to contemplate the Father. She got out of place by rushing "forth in advance of the rest," yet was restrained by Horos. She gave birth out of her passion, an enthymesis, which was taken away from her and fenced away from the Pleroma by Horos. Christ and the Holy Spirit were then produced by Monogenes to further strengthen the Pleroma. Jesus was produced as a fruit of the entire Pleroma with angels to be his bodyguards.<sup>30</sup>

The enthymesis of Sophia, called Achamoth, needed help. Achamoth is from the Hebrew chochmah, חֵכֶם.<sup>31</sup> Christ took pity, imparted something of himself on her through the Cross (Horos, or Stauros) so that she might come to discover within herself her own true identity. It was out of the passions Achamoth felt in wanting to return to the Pleroma that this world was formed. The agent of this formation was the Demiurge. Christ sent the Paraclete to her to save her. Out of all this struggle, three types of human beings were created--the material, the animal, and the spiritual. The Demiurge thought he alone was God. The devil (the Cosmocrator, ruler of the world) and the demons, and angels, and wicked spiritual beings evolved out of grief. The Demiurge knew nothing of his mother

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 316-317.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 317-318.

<sup>31</sup>Jonas, 186.

Achamoth or her offspring. A human being then has an animal soul from the Demiurge, the body from the earth, the fleshy part from matter, and the spiritual being from the mother Achamoth.<sup>32</sup> For the Ptolemaeians, the people of the church represented the animal souls, while the Ptolemaeians were the spiritual ones.<sup>33</sup> This idea infuriated Irenaeus. The three kinds of humans were represented by Cain (spiritual), Abel (material), and Seth (animal).<sup>34</sup>

Irenaeus finds their vocabulary ridiculous. He could postulate Gourd which would produce with Utter-Emptiness a Cucumber and the Cucumber could produce a Melon and still not be as silly as the Valentinians.<sup>35</sup>

Irenaeus discusses Marcus, Simon Magus of Samaria (the bane of Justin Martyr), Menander, Saturninus, Basilides, Cerinthus, the Ebionites, the Nicolaitanes, Cerdo, Marcion of Pontus, the Encratites, the Barbeliotes, the Ophites, Sethians, and the Cainites. Marcion, says Irenaeus, removed all out of Luke that pertained to the generation of the Lord. He set aside a great amount of the Lord's teachings, especially where the Lord is confessing the Maker of the Universe as his Father. Also Marcion cut out a lot of the Epistles of Paul, especially where God is written about as Maker of the world, as well as many prophetic sayings which Paul uses

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<sup>32</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, 320-323.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 332-333.

about the foretelling of the coming of the Lord.<sup>36</sup>

The Gnostics assert, says Irenaeus, that at the consummation of all things, their mother (Achamoth) shall re-enter the Pleroma and receive the Savior as her consort. They will get rid of their animal souls and will be the consorts of the spiritual angels. The Demiurge will pass into the place of the mother. Material will be gathered to material, spiritual to spiritual, the impious shall be consigned to the fire.<sup>37</sup>

Irenaeus calls these systems "falsely termed Gnostics."<sup>38</sup> They sprang, he said, from Simon "the father of all heretics."<sup>39</sup> These heretics refute the scriptures, assert the scriptures are not correct or are ambiguous, and do not contain the truth because the truth was handed down orally, not by written means. Irenaeus accuses these heretics of inventing what seems plausible to them. Indeed, these heretics neither subscribe to tradition nor to scripture, but to their own base fiction.<sup>40</sup>

Irenaeus can trace a line of "apostolic succession" back to Peter and Paul in Rome. They were followed by: Linus, the bishop to whom Paul refers in Timothy; Anacletus; Clement of Rome; Evaristus; Alexander; Sixtus; Telephorus; Hyginus; Pius; Anicetus; Sotor; and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 412, 513.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 415.

Eleutherius, bishop of Rome at the writing by Irenaeus. But Gnostics have no such succession. Before Valentinius, "those who follow Valentinus had no existence; nor did those from Marcion exist before Marcion; nor in short, had any of those malignant-minded people, whom I have above enumerated, any being previous to the initiators and inventors of their perversity." Valentinus came to Rome during the time of Hyginus, "flourished under Pius, and remained until Anicetus." Cerdon, who was Marcion's predecessor (did not Irenaeus just say that Marcion had no predecessors?), came to Rome during the episcopate of Hyginus, but was thrown out of the church for teaching corruption. Marcion succeeded Cerdon and flourished under Anicetus. But the rest of the Gnostics "took rise" under Simon and Menander.<sup>41</sup>

The Gnostics, in fact, corrupt the truth, says Irenaeus: "Lime is wickedly mixed with the milk of God." The Lord Jesus Christ, who came in the fullness of time, as the only begotten Word and Son of God, has been subdivided as the Gnostics have invented Ogdoads and Tetrads.<sup>42</sup>

Irenaeus wrote:

These men do, in fact, set the Spirit aside altogether; they understand that Christ was one and Jesus another; and they teach that there was not one Christ, but many. And if they speak of them as united, they do again separate them: for they show that one did indeed undergo sufferings, but that the other remained impassible; that the one truly did ascend to the Pleroma, but the other remained in the intermediate place; that the one does truly feast and revel in places invisible and above all name, but that the other is seated with the Demiurge, emptying

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<sup>41</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, 416-417.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 445.

him of power.<sup>43</sup>

Irenaeus accuses the gnostics "falsely-so-called" of inventing systems. But as I try to consider the rather detailed system he gives of the Ptolemaens, it seems that this system was well thought out over a long period of time and indeed does say some philosophical things about humankind and the place of humans in the universe.

Tertullian, born in Carthage about the middle of the second century C.E., son of a pagan centurion, was educated in law and was securely established in that profession when in 193 he converted to Christian faith. Whether he was ordained is not known. In 203 he joined the Montanists. He wrote a great amount of material during his time as orthodox Christian, much of it against Marcion and Valentinus.<sup>44</sup>

Tertullian begins his Prescription Against Heretics:

The character of the times in which we live is such as to call forth from us even this admonition, that we ought not to be astonished at the heresies (which abound); neither their existence ought to surprise us, for it was foretold that they should come to pass; nor the fact that they subvert the faith of some, for their final cause is, by affording a trial to faith, to give it also the opportunity of being "approved." Groundless, therefore, and inconsiderate is the offense of the many who are scandalized by the very fact heresies prevail to such a degree.<sup>45</sup>

The heresies were like a fever, for which he had the prescription, said Tertullian, that has no strength within itself but preys

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Henry Bettenson, ed., The Early Christian Fathers (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 15, 1.

off the weaknesses of people to bring death. Heresies (αἵρεσεις) is a Greek word referring to choice, he says, which is made when a person chooses to take up certain beliefs and practices and teaches others to do so.<sup>46</sup>

Philosophy and dialectics, according to Tertullian are the beginning of evil. "Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!" Earlier he asks what "concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?"<sup>47</sup>

Tertullian would not be willing to allow the heretics to argue their case from the scriptures. For one thing, the scriptures did not belong to these heretics. For another, the heretics wanted to pick and choose and alter the writings. "Truth is just as much opposed by an adulteration of its meaning as it is by a corruption of its text," he wrote. The appeal against heresies is not to be made from the scriptures. It is rather that whatever should result as the true Christian rule and faith, the true scriptures and traditions will also be present.<sup>48</sup>

Tertullian wrote most especially against Marcion and Valentinus. Waxing sarcastic at the heretics, Tertullian points out that error ironically reigned only so long as there were no heresies. "Truth had to wait for certain Marcionites and Valentinians to set it free." Yet, that stance is absurd because, he says, "in all cases truth

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 2-7.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19-22.

precedes its copy, the likeness succeeds its reality." <sup>49</sup>

Tertullian says that Marcion was a shipmaster from Pontus and a student of Stoicism. Marcion and Valentinus, both originally believers of Catholic doctrine, had come to Rome during the reign of Antoninus and the episcopate of Eleutherus. Marcion had brought two hundred sesterces to the church in Rome, but had been excommunicated--later he had repented and would have come back into the Church and brought his followers back into it; but he died before he could do so. <sup>50</sup>

Marcion and Valentinus both misapplied the holy writ. Marcion cut portions out. He separated the Old and New Testaments. He used the knife, says Tertullian, and not the pen to corrupt. Valentinus, while he did not cut the scriptures up, invented scriptures and rearranged and added portions to suit his own subject matters. <sup>51</sup>

Marcion introduced the doctrine of a second god, a god of goodness only, in addition to the Creator. A follower of Marcion called Apelles said the Creator was nondescript but glorious as an angel under the superior God of Goodness as well as being the god of the law and god of Israel. Valentinus had his doctrine of the Aeons whereby an Aeon generated with his Grace: Sense and Truth which in turn produced Word and Life which produced Man and Church--these primary eight produced ten other Aeons which then produced another

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<sup>49</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 15, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 35, 46.



twelve Aeons for a total of thirty. The sin of one of the Aeons produced the Creator God.<sup>52</sup> This may or may not be similar to Marcion's Creator God.

Tertullian wrote at length on this Aeon system. First there was the primary Aeon--Perfect Aeon, *Ἀΐων τὸ ἄρχειν*; or Proarche (Before the Beginning), *προαρχή*; or He Arche (The Beginning), *Ἡ Αρχή*; or sometimes Bythos (Depth)--a strange name for one who dwells in the heights. Bythos, with a second Aeon, Ennoea (Thought) or Charis (Grace) or Sige (Silence), produced a third Aeon, Nus (Mind) who is called Father and the Beginning of all things and Monogenes (The Only-begotten), along with a fourth Aeon, a female Veritas (Truth). These four are the main group--the parent stock of all the rest. Nus produced Sermo (Word) and Vita (Life). Vita produced Homo (Man) and Ecclesia (Church). Sermo and Vita then produced these couplings: Bythios (Profound) and Mixis (Mixture), Agerator (Never old) and Henosis (Union), Autophyes (Essential Nature) and Hedone (Pleasure), Acinetos (Immoveable) and Synchysis (Commixture), Monogenes (Only-begotten) and Macaria (Happiness). Homo and Ecclesia produced these: Paracletus (Comforter) and Pistis (Faith), Patricas (Paternal) and Elpis (Hope), Metricos (Maternal) and Agape (Love), Ainos (Praise) and Synesis (Intelligence), Ecclesiasticus (Son of Ecclesia) and Macariotes (Blessedness), and Theletus (Perfect) and Sophia (Wisdom).<sup>53</sup> (See Plate II.)

Nus was the only one of the Aeons who had knowledge of the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 128-131.

Father, Monogenes. They all wanted this knowledge. Sophia, the youngest, broke away from Theletus her husband and went in search of the Father. Failing to do this, out of her desire nonetheless to do so, she gave birth to a female offspring. Prevailing upon the Father for help, she was given that help by Horos who was produced in the Father's image. Her offspring was cast out of the Pleroma. The Father then produced Christ and the Holy Spirit in order to prevent any more disruption of the Pleroma. "It was the function of Christ to instruct the Aeons in the nature of their conjugal relations (you see what the whole thing was, of course!)," wrote Tertullian. Jesus was then produced as the perfect fruit of the entire Pleroma. The Enthymesis (Desire) or Achamoth, having been thrown out of the Pleroma, was helped by Christ and the Holy Spirit. In time, she gave birth to an offspring who became the Demiurgus. He created a new world, this one, and a heaven of seven stages. The Demiurge created the devil who rules this world. The Demiurge created man out of clay like a potter, animated man with his own breath, but did not know that the clay was made with the essence of Achamoth's tears in it. Man is a creation of a three-fold nature: after Cain (material), Abel (animal), and Seth (spiritual).<sup>54</sup> This differs from Irenaeus' report that the three were: Cain (spiritual), Abel (material), and Seth (animal).

The end of the human race will be: the souls of the just will go with the Demiurge to the middle region; the Valentinians will go

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<sup>54</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 15, 132-154.

to the palace of the Pleroma--nothing animal can go there.<sup>55</sup>

Marcion denied Christ had come in the flesh. He denied the nativity, as did Apelles whom Valentinus resembled in his beliefs. They denied Mary's conception, pregnancy, childbearing, and the life of the infant. Tertullian said Marcion hated human flesh, even the flesh of the newborn infant. Marcion and Apelles said Christ borrowed his flesh from the stars and the substances of the higher world. Christ's flesh was "after the pattern of the angels" and was not born. Marcion and Basilides held that Christ's flesh had no reality. Valentinus and Apelles held that it had characteristics "peculiar to itself."<sup>56</sup>

Where Tertullian said Marcion was a student of Stocism, he said Valentinus was a student of Plato. Valentinus had expected to be a bishop as he "was an able man in genius and eloquence." But when he failed to be elected, he was indignant and broke with the church.<sup>57</sup>

The heretics, said Tertullian, threw what is holy to the dogs. All were puffed up. The "catechumens are perfect before they are full-taught." The women, so bold, taught, did exorcisms, cured, even baptized. Novices were put into office. And the offices changed--one day this man was bishop, the next day, another. A man was deacon today, tomorrow a reader. Today a man was presbyter, tomorrow a layman. Even laymen performed the functions of the priest. And

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 40, 164-177, 217.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 124.

they did not even work to convert the heathen, but to subvert the orthodox.<sup>58</sup> And as for the Valentinians, the doctrines that have grown among them have extended into those of the Gnostics.<sup>59</sup>

It is interesting that both Tertullian and Irenaeus report basically the same Aeon system. For non-gnostics, this is good research. It must show that both drew on the same material or that one, perhaps Tertullian, drew on the other as a source. It is also interesting that in view of the things he wrote against the gnostics, as well as the irateness he expressed against women teaching and baptizing, he should finally join the Montanists. It is thirdly interesting that the later church fathers should have retained the writings of Tertullian as orthodox instruction even though Tertullian had joined those Montanists. It would be as if Judaic rabbis had retained the writings of Paul while he was still a Jewish pharisee, if such had existed, as rabbinic instruction even after Paul had left Judaism to become Christian.

Hippolytus, Bishop of Rome, wrote The Refutation of All Heresies, (Philosophumena), perhaps in the early 3rd Century C.E.<sup>60</sup> Jean Doresse wrote that the Philosophumena, discovered in 1851, had been incorrectly attributed to Hippolytus.<sup>61</sup> However, the work holds the views that Hippolytus surely had, in any case.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>60</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds, The Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 7, 17-21.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Doresse, The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics (New York: Viking, 1960), 3-6.

One line of connection might be accounted for in the fact that much of the work of the Philosophemena seems to be taken directly from the work of Irenaeus. In fact, Hippolytus, or whoever the author actually was of the Philosophemena, may have requested that Irenaeus do some research for his project. Hippolytus may have been the "dear friend" to whom Irenaeus wrote, as referred to earlier. The Philosophemena is such an exhaustive work that the author may have had many "research assistants."<sup>62</sup>

Hippolytus wrote about such authors as Thales, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Anaximander, Aristotle, and other ancient philosophers. He discussed the Stoics, the Druids, Astrologers, the Numerical Theorists, Magicians, Spell casters, and Divinationists. Simon and Valentinus, he sees as being followers of Pythagoras (indeed, all heresies have come from "arithmetical art") who taught his number systems among Greeks from Egypt. Simon talked of Mind, Intelligence, Name, Voice, Ratiocination, Reflection, and "He who stood and stands and will stand." Valentinus talked of Mind, Truth, Word, Life, Man, Church, and the Father. Furthermore, Simon and Valentinus had developed their systems from considering the brain after dissection; for the arrangements of membranes and chambers, and cerebellum, and blood vessels and the like suggested certain patterns upon which to philosophize.<sup>63</sup>

Hippolytus discussed the Naasseni who styled themselves Gnostics,

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<sup>62</sup>Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 6, 21-22, 195-264.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-124.

framed their system not out of the Holy Scriptures, but out of Greek systems such as furnished by Herodotus the historian, from Homer, as well as from Egyptian and Assyrian systems. In this context, Hippolytus referred to the Gospel of Thomas and its reference to the saying about children of seven years old.<sup>64</sup>

Hippolytus included a Gnostic Naasseni hymn which begins: "The world's producing law was Primal Mind, And next was First-born's outpoured chaos; and third, The soul received its law of toil. . ." Jesus sees the ills on the earth and asks his father to send him: "On this account, O Father, send me; Bearing seals, I shall descend; Through ages while I'll sweep, All mysteries I'll unravel, And forms of Gods I'll show; And secrets of the saintly path, Styled 'Gnosis,' I'll impart."<sup>65</sup>

Discussed was the system of the Peratae, who were great astrologers by seeing the universe as Father, Son, and Matter. Intermediate between Matter and Father are the Son, which is the Word, and the Serpent which nonetheless all move toward the unmoved Father.<sup>66</sup>

Sethians are discussed. They have a book called Paraphrase of Seth containing their secret tenets. They speak of three definite principles of the universe. Wind, serpent, and water are important to Sethians as is light and darkness.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 125-139.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 153

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 154-169.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 170-181.

The Justinians, for whom Hercules was a hero, had a pagan, unscriptural tradition in which three unbegotten powers, two male and one female, are at the root of all things. Twenty-four powers are generated. Important to Justinians were the words in 1 Cor. 2:9 saying: "What eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, and the things which have not entered into the heart."<sup>68</sup>

Basilides is discussed. His doctrines came from Aristotle. God is seen in the beginning as "non-existent" in the sense of potential with all potentialities present, (Creation ex-nihilo) like a seed in which a sonship was produced with a three-fold division with one part refined, another gross, and a third needing purification. The firmament when created was placed between the supermundane and the world, thus bringing about two continuous and primary divisions of things. From the realm above the heaven came the Great Archon, Head of the World. He thought he was the only Lord and did not know of the threefold sonships with one Son wiser than he. But the Son came down to sit at his right hand and became his son. Jesus was born as the first fruit of a different order of things and to purify the third sonship.<sup>69</sup>

Discussed is Saturnilus who asserted there is one Father, unknown to all. Humankind was made by angels--they were the ones who said, "Let us make man in our likeness and image." The God of the Jews is one of the angels. Christ came to overthrow this angel,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 183-194.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 267-289.

the God of the Jews, in order to destroy worthless men and demons, and save good men--the two kinds of men made by the angels.<sup>70</sup>

Hippolytus attacked Marcion of Pontus. Marcion was not a follower of Christ, but of Empedocles who held that two great causes exist in the universe--discord and friendship. Empedocles traces the beginning of all things to four roots--Jupiter (fire), Juno (life giving earth), Aidoneus (air), and Nestis (water). Discord separates; but Friendship makes unity out of plurality--and so these two forces constantly work bringing many and then one and then many and then one again. As such, Empedocles saw himself as a part of God wandering in exile to be punished for some reason and then brought back into Friendship once more. Empedocles admonished his disciples not to eat meat because that would be feeding on the "habitations of punished souls." Also he taught them not to have intercourse with women for such action is severing the work of Friendship (by producing pregnancy and adding more human bodies to the plurality of Discord). Thus, Hippolytus complained that Marcion was not following the Bible, even dispoiled the philosophy of Empedocles by instituting a system of good and evil of his own and by teaching about the evil Demiurge and a good Deity. He forbade marriage and the procreation of children, as well as the eating of meat (which, according to Hippolytus, God had provided to be eaten). The principal heresy of Marcion, however, was to see a mediator between the good and evil forces of the universe in the Logos that descended

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<sup>70</sup>Roberts and Donalson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 6, 289-290.



in the unbegotten Jesus, thus presenting a third principle to the universal forces. Indeed, this intermediary of Logos was fashioned after Empedocles' concept of "muse." Thus, Marcion "transferred the philosophy invented by" Empedocles "into his own system of thought" and "constructed his own impious heresy."<sup>71</sup>

Hippolytus discussed Carpocrates, who asserted the universe had been made by angels, that Jesus was generated from Joseph and upon Jesus an unbegotten soul had descended to combat the world-making Archons.<sup>72</sup>

Cerinthus, who was taught by Egyptians, said the world was not made by the Primal Deity, but by an offshoot from that Deity. Jesus was not born of a virgin, but born in the normal manner of Mary and Joseph. And Jesus was simply more wise than other men. Christ in the form of a dove descended upon Jesus at his baptism. Christ departed, Jesus suffered alone and rose from the dead.<sup>73</sup>

Similar to these were the heresies of the Ebionaeans, of Theodotus, the Melchisedians, the Nicolaitans (Nicolaus had been named one of the diaconate by the Apostles, who then departed from church doctrine, and whose followers were reproved by John in Revelation as fornicators and eaters of things offered idols), Cerdon (who preached that the God preached by Moses and the prophets was not the Father of Jesus Christ and whose tenets Marcion had developed

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 290-299.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 302.

in his own writing (Antitheses), and Apelles.<sup>74</sup>

Hippolytus discussed the Docetists, in many ways similar to those just considered. Discussed also: Monoimus, Tatian, Hermogenes, the Quartodecimans, the Montanists, and the Encratites. Then were the heresies of Noetus, Heraclitus, Callistus, the Elchasaites, and Jewish sects of the Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Jewish Religion in general.<sup>75</sup>

Hippolytus presented a doctrine of truth of his own. There is One God, first and only, Creator, Lord of all--nothing is coeval with Him, neither chaos, water, earth, air, fire, spirit or anything. He made those things--fire, earth, etc., from one essence, others from two or three or four essences or substances. This Deity brought forth Logos first as a ratiocination of the universe--this Logos was in the Father Himself. This Logos helped create the world, and is of God and of the substance of God. But God did not make evil, only good. Man was created with capacity of self-determination; and this brought forth evil. Just men were born who were prophets of God who conveyed the Logos to men; but later God sent the Logos direct by way of a virgin to remodel the fallen or "old" men into a new creation.<sup>76</sup>

Hippolytus completely lambasts those heretics--their systems are stupid etc.--yet, as I read his, I find myself thinking his is similar, and indeed, not all that different from theirs. That

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 303-307.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 308-364.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 394-400.

is: the One God who made everything out of one essence, or two, or three or four, then brought forth Logos of the substance of the Father Himself--(Where did the "Father" come forth? we were talking about the One God Deity.) and after God had created men, they somehow turned out to be evil. So God sent Logos to complete the job of creation and somehow make these men good. (And this whole idea of the bringing forth of Logos out of the substance of the Father sounds very Arian to me--which brings the issue of whether what was to become Arianism was in its earlier stage an orthodox view.) The discussion looks to me like the same "number game" with variations and different names, but the basic "DNA" inherent. Is the basic idea that has been the dividing point over whether the Primal God existed alone or with a Companion? Is this the basic issue? And, of course, that is an important issue. But then this Logos that the Father brought forth as a ratiocination of the universe--what manner of attitudes is involved here? It all sounds like Rorshauch ink blots to me. And if one is to be Biblical in the sense of consulting Genesis 1, there is with Elohim his spirit Ruah who moves across the face of the waters. "Elohim" is used in a masculine singular, but is a plural word, indicated by the "im." Ruah, in Hebrew, is a feminine form, which is somehow co-existent and independent, so as to be able to move over the water, apart from Elohim. Chaos, water, earth, and Spirit were all there at the beginning.

Hippolytus, and later, Epiphanius, indicated that the systems of the heretics came from a long development of Hellenistic philosophies. Indeed, Harnack's comment that Gnosticism was the Hellenization of Christianity in this sense hits the target. Yet, I feel

that someone writing from some other point of view could include the system stated above by Hippolytus right along with others and not see much difference.

Epiphanius, Bishop of Constantia of Cyprus, was asked sometime around the year 376 C.E. by presbyters named Acacius and Paul to write a complete "heresiology." He therefore composed a work called Panarion to defend the true religion of the Holy Catholic Church. "Panarion" is a word, according to Epiphanius, that means "chest of remedies for victims of wild beasts' bites." The eighty sects he "exposes" are symbolically represented as wild beasts that threaten the Holy Church.<sup>77</sup>

Epiphanius discussed: (1) Barbarism, (2) Scythianism, (3) Hellenism, (4) Judaism, (5) Pythagoreans, (6) Platonism, (7) Stoicism, (8) Epicureans, and (9) Samaritanism. Under Samaritanism, he discussed (10) Corothenes, (11) Sabuaeans, (12) Essenes, and (13) Dositheans. Under the Judaic sects, he discussed (14) Scribes, (15) Pharisees, (16) Sadducees, (17) Hemerobaptists, (18) Ossenes, (19) Nasaraeans, and (20) Herodians.<sup>78</sup>

He discussed in section two of his first volume: (21) Simonians, the followers of Simon of Samaria, (22) Menandrians, followers of Simon's disciple Menander, (23) Satornilians, (24) Basilideans, (25) Nicolaitans, (26) Gnostics who are successors of these sects-- in Egypt they are called Stratiotics and Phibionites; in Upper Egypt, Secundians; in other places, Socratists and Zacchaeans or

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<sup>77</sup> Epiphanius, Panarion, trans. Francis Williams (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 1-3.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 10-13.

Coddians or Borborites; (27) Carpocratians, (28) Cerinthians, (29) Nazoraeans, (30) Ebionites, (31) Valentinians, (32) Secundians, and (33) Ptolemaeans.<sup>79</sup>

In the third section of his first volume, Epiphanius discussed: (34) Marcosians, (35) Colorbasus, (36) Heracleonites, who "redeem" those who are dying members with oil, balsam, and wine, as well as by pronouncing certain Hebrew invocations over the head of the dying person, (37) Ophites, who glorify the serpent and think it is Christ, (38) Cainites, who glorify Cain, (39) Sethians, who glorify Seth, (40) Archontics, who trace the universe to many archons, (41) Cerdonians, named for Cerdo, (42) Marcionites, named for Marcion of Pontus, (43) Lucianists, (44) Apelleans, (45) Severians, named for Severus, a follower of Apelles, and (46) Tatianists, named for Tatian, a follower of Justin Martyr, but who later joined the disciples of Marcion.<sup>80</sup>

Epiphanius, in subsequent volumes two and three, discussed the others that made up his entire list of eighty. They included: Encratites, Phrygians (Montanists), Theodotianists, Melchizedekians, Sabellians, Manichacians, Arians, and Dimirites (Apollinarians).<sup>81</sup> It is quite an ambitious work.

Simon of Samaria, that "scum," sorcerer, who "duped" the people with his magic, is a really vile fellow, according to Epiphanius.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 62-64.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 229-231.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 65.

(Simon is so bad, he is a lot like the way Roman Catholics used to describe Martin Luther.) It is interesting he has the same first name as Jesus' disciple Simon Peter. He had a woman named Helen, who was supposedly the Helen in another reincarnation on whose account the Trojan War started. This Helen was the Ennoia, the Holy Spirit, through which Simon claimed he, as God, created the angels who created the world and men. She was also called Barbero in other sects, also Athena. Simon had mystery rituals in which he used seminal fluid and menstrual flow. He spoke of principalities, authorities, various heavens, and purification of souls. The Law is not God's, "but belongs to the power on the left" and whoever believes in the Old Testament will die.<sup>83</sup>

Saturnilus and Basilides were fellow students under Menander; Menander was a follower of Simon of Samaria. They said that the unknown Father is one. He made the power and the principalities. The angels rebelled, and seven of them made the world with a piece of the world parcelled out to each. They then made man in the form of a luminous image above, thus the meaning of Genesis: "Let us make man in an image and after a likeness." But the man was weak and was given a spark from above; the sparks will be preserved though man will perish. Christ only came in the semblance of man from the Father above to destroy the angels, including the angel that is the God of the Jews. Saturnilus said two men were created--one good, one evil. Marriage and procreation are of Satan (who is also an angel). Followers of Saturnilus did not eat meat.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 65-68.

Basilides went to Egypt to teach. He taught one Father of all from whom power and principalities and angels have come. These principalities and angels have made the heavens and more angels. A total of 365 heavens were made. One of the angels was the God of the Jews and was the one who fashioned man. The angels parcelled out parts of the world. The God of the Jews was the angel who drew them and protects them, and indeed has decided to subject all nations to him by having instituted wars. Jesus, the son of the Father over all, was sent to aid men. He came as an appearance only. Simon of Cyrene was the one who really died on the cross (another Simon) while Jesus himself stood apart and laughed at the whole thing. Jesus is thus our Savior because he revealed the truth of things to us. (I do not think it was very nice of Jesus to stand by and laugh as Simon died on the cross.) Followers of Basilides loved luxury, practiced all kinds of promiscuity, did not see martyrdom as necessary, and felt the important thing to do was "Know everyone yourself, but let none know you." Evil did not come into existence until the creation of man. Abrasax is the name of the first Principle; his name adds up to 365. Thus Basilides and Saturnilus are discussed in the ways they have similar beliefs.<sup>84</sup>

Nicolaus, originally a proselyte in Antioch, counted with the deacons, like Stephen, appointed by the apostles, finally fell from that state to indulge in sex and other wickednesses. His sect glorified Barbelo who is in the eighth heaven, having been

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<sup>84</sup> Epiphanius, Panarion, 71-82.

emitted by the Father. She is the mother perhaps of Ialdabaoth who rules the seventh heaven and thinks there is no other god beside him. Also honored was Prunicus by practices with seminal fluid and menstrual flow. Honored also was Kaulakau of the twelfth vision. They had concepts of Darkness, Depth, Water, Spirit, Four Aeons in the Womb from which fourteen other Aeons came, right and left, and the emission of an ignoble son.<sup>85</sup>

Then discussed were the Gnostics, or Borborites, closely associated with the Nicolaitans. They honored Noria, who was Noah's wife. They honored Barbelo. They said Eve got the food of knowledge from the serpent. They had eating, drinking, and sexual orgies as well as rituals with seminal fluid and menstrual flow. But they rejected procreation of children and even caused abortion of the child if pregnancy did occur and ate the foetus. They had books called, "Questions of Mary," and Apocalypses of Adam. The archon who holds this world captive looks like a dragon and swallows souls to return them to the world through his penis to be implanted in animals as well as human lives. Sabaoth (the Jewish God) looks like an ass or a pig. In departing the world the soul encounters these archons and can escape through them if one is "filled" with knowledge or gnosis to get to the eighth heaven where Barbelo is and where the soul is saved.<sup>86</sup>

The Carpocratians (who formed one of the branches of Gnostics) believed that Jesus' soul, though reared in Jewish customs, yet

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 85-89.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 90-99.



despised those Jewish customs. His soul had received powers to overcome earthly passions and rise above the creators of the world. Not only Jesus' soul, but the souls of his followers will progress beyond the angels who made the world. Human souls will soar aloft--like Jesus' soul--if they receive that power.<sup>87</sup> It is like the Easter hymn by Charles Wesley, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," in which we now soar where Christ has led.

The Carpocratians had a story about the parable of "Going before the Judge." (Matt. 5:25-26) They said the "adversary" is one of the angels who made this world and has the task of judging the souls when the souls depart the body. If they are judged as having not done everything in this world they should have, they are given by the archon to the "officer"--the officer is the angel who assists the "judge" and brings the souls back into the world into new bodies. This "adversary" is the Devil.<sup>88</sup>

Of the Valentinians, Epiphanius rendered Irenaeus verbatim. The Gnostics all sprouted from the earth like mushrooms at about the same time and each borrowed from the others of their vile concepts. They all called themselves Gnostics. Valentinus, who got a Greek education in Alexandria, took his myths from heathen mythology and put in his own terms--thirty gods, aeons, and heavens, of which Depth is the first. With fifteen female aeons and fifteen male aeons, called "syzygies," as a spiritual pleroma, a defect called the Demiurge came in search of a soul from its

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 112.

mother Wisdom (Achamoth). Jesus, along with an unattached aeon, Limit, (or Cross) passed through Mary as the Christ from above. Epiphanius claims Valentinus got his concepts from Hesiod. Valentinians denied the resurrection of the dead (it is not the body that rises but the soul). Material is returned to material, earthly to earth, (and spirit to spirit).<sup>89</sup>

Epiphanius discussed Ptolomy who invented two consorts, Conception and Will, for the primal God called Depth. "Ptolomy's Letter to Flora" included in Epiphanius' work lets us hear directly from Ptolomy. Ptolomy starts by saying that while some hold that the Law and world were created by "our God and Father," others hold they were created by the Devil. He goes on to defend the latter view. Indeed, it is logical that the Law which itself is incomplete and needs fulfillment by someone else could not have been made by a good God. The five books of Moses, indeed, were not the work of one "legislator"--but in three divisions by God, by Moses, and by the elders. He uses Jesus' statement about how Moses instituted divorce because of the hardness of men's hearts to prove that Moses even put into the Law what God had not decreed. He goes on to show how other things in the Law were put in by the elders, not by either God or Moses. Ptolomy asks how a good God could have sent evil souls into an evil world. If they were sent to do something right but did it wrong, this would prove the one who sent them was lacking in foreknowledge--hardly an adequate God. Ptolomy discusses resurrection. If God raised the body,

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<sup>89</sup> Epiphanius, Panarion, 165-204.

how is it he abandoned it after resurrection to the four elements? If he raised it to destroy it again, how is this an honest act? Resurrection is the raising of the body and the soul united with the Godhead. Ptolomy has harsh things to say of those who disagree with this view--they are liars, scum, wasps stinging a rock. Sacrifices are to be in terms of hymns and praises and thanksgiving and charity to neighbors, not of dumb animals. Circumcision is not to be of the foreskin but of the spiritual heart. The Sabbath is to be kept. Fasting is to be not in terms of physically not eating, but to be in terms of abstaining from doing evil (thus outward fasting). Ptolomy attempts to identify the God who gave the Law, who he says is not in fact the Devil but another. The Devil is midway between the Perfect God and the Demiurge. Ptolomy ends by saying that Flora will learn more later for she has been "adjudged worthy of the apostolic tradition" which he himself has in fact received. Well, Epiphanius certainly thinks this letter is the work of a charlatan. It is a lie and a created horror. Ptolomy and his followers do not see what is right in front of them. The arguments Ptolomy introduces are in fact assembled against him. Moses wrote, instituting divorce, under the guidance of divine will. And what kind of a third God is this that Ptolomy introduces? And whereas Ptolomy called opponents "scum," Epiphanius calls Ptolomy "scum."<sup>90</sup>

In his last section of volume one, Epiphanius discussed a last group of similar groups. These included the Marcosians,

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 213-228.

the Sethians, the Ophites, the Marcionites, the Apelleans, and the Tatianists among others.<sup>91</sup>

Marcus was a successor to Secundus, Epiphanes, Ptolomy, and Valentinus. He practiced magic. Epiphanius writes verbatim from Irenaeus on Marcus. Colorbasus drew on both Marcus and Ptolomy. Heracleon followed Colorbasus. Heracleon tried to "redeem" his followers even at death by mixing oil and water, then applying it to the head of the person dying. This was accompanied by an invocation of secret words. This supposedly allowed the soul of the dead one to pass by the principalities and thus ascend to the Pleroma. There were formulas to tell the principalities--"I am a son descended from a Father who was before me. . ." and so on. The Ophites stemmed off of the sects of Nicolaus. The snake, important to Ophites, was worshipped. All knowledge was ascribed to the serpent. The mother Prunicus had come down into the waters. Her son Ialdabaoth, who had begot seven sons who begot seven heavens, was the God of the Jews. These seven sons created man in the image of Ialdabaoth. Prunicus sent a spark into man so that he was able to rise up above the eight heavens and recognize the Father above all. This distressed Ialdabaoth who sired a power that resembled a snake. It was this snake that was sent to deceive Eve by causing man to forget the Father and the Mother on high. But the snake taught Eve knowledge. The Ophites used a snake in their mystery rituals. The Cainites got their name from Cain. They claimed Cain descended from the stronger power, and Abel from a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 229-231.

weaker one. Judas they recognized as kin. They performed obscenities. And they had explanations as to why Judas had to betray Christ. The Sethians, a sect in Egypt, traced themselves to Seth, son of Adam, were similar to the Cainites. Seth was an ancestor of Christ.<sup>92</sup>

Cerdo, a follower of Simon and Saturnilus, came from Syria to Rome. Cerdo preached two Gods. The good God was Father to Jesus. The evil God is the Demiurge who spoke in the Law and the prophets. Christ was not born of Mary nor appeared in the flesh but only in non-material appearance. Cerdo rejected the resurrection of the dead. Epiphanius felt there could not be two first principals at once.<sup>93</sup>

A disciple of Cerdo was Marcion. The Marcionites spread widely--to parts of Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Cyprus, and the Thebaid, as well as Persia and beyond. Marcion came from Pontus. He was a celibate hermit and son of a bishop. But he seduced a virgin and was excommunicated by his father. He came to Rome and was still barred from the church. Finally he joined the sect of Cerdo. Along with the good God and the evil Demiurge, Marcion saw the Devil as a kind of third God. Marcion preached celibacy, a Sabbath fast, and practiced the mystery ritual in front of the catechumens. This last was a thing that shocked Epiphanius. Marcion denied resurrection of the flesh; salvation is of the soul

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<sup>92</sup> Epiphanius, Panarion, 232-286.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 295-297.

only. Marcion allowed as many baptisms as a person wanted. The Law and the prophets were under the influence of the archon who made the world. Christ descended from the invisible Father on high to confound the God of the Law, the prophets, and the Jews. Marcion even permitted women to administer baptism, a shocking thing to Epiphanius. They believed in transmigration of souls. Marcion tampered with the scriptures. Luke was his only gospel--one that he cut words off at the beginning, at the end and in the middle. He also deleted portions of the Pauline epistles. So Marcion's Bible was Luke, Galatians, Corinthians, Second Corinthians, Romans, Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians, and a book called Laodiceans. Epiphanius took up Marcion's canon and very carefully went through it and wrote down what he had changed and "excized." Marcion cut out the birth stories in the first two chapters and began at Chapter 3 which begins, "In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar . . . ." Mostly, Marcion's account is shorter, with words removed. For instance, as Jesus dies, Marcion has, "And when he had cried with a loud voice he gave up the ghost," instead of "With a loud voice Jesus cried, 'Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit!' And with these words he died." (Luke 23:46)<sup>94</sup> But strangely, what Marcion had is very similar to Mark: "But having uttered a strong cry, Jesus died." (Mark 15:37).

Similar to Marcion was Lucian, who was a follower of Marcion; Apelles, who was a classmate of Lucian; Severus, who followed

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 301-376.

Apelles, who talked about a black vine and a white vine and that these resembled snakes; and Tatian, who was a follower of Justin Martyr but joined the Valentinians after Justin died.<sup>95</sup> Thus ended the first book of Epiphanius.

Epiphanius perhaps wrote between the Nicaean and Constantinopolitan Councils of 325 and 381 C.E. He identified eighty heresies, raising a question as to why there were so many "heresies." Is it just coincidence that at a time of acceptance by the Roman Empire of Christian Faith as the state religion, with the refining of that faith in terms of Arianism verses Athanasianism, that there would be produced a rather narrow defining of what that faith is and who therefore could get on the new "band wagon"? Further, is it mere coincidence that much of the discussions involved that we still have material about seemed to center in Rome? Why were the Nag Hammadi codices buried when they were? Were they a part of the events of the establishment of the orthodoxy of faith that was struggled about in the late fourth century C.E.?

Epiphanius presents information about Marcion that is different from what was previously written. Was Marcion a shipmaster or a hermit? Is it true he seduced a virgin, presumably a virgin dedicated in service to the Church? What happened to her? Was she excommunicated also or did she become one of his followers? As to Tatian, did he join the Valentinians or the followers of Marcion? Or were the Valentinians the followers of Marcion?

From the church fathers just cited, the picture emerges that

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 376-391.

bears similarities to today. In Justin Martyr's time, there were groups that were calling themselves Christian, yet in contention with each other--each claiming to be the true Christians with the others, heretics. By the time of Irenaeus there was an "apostolic succession" of bishops in Rome claiming to go back to Peter and Paul. All other streams were alleged to be heretical in the opinion of Irenaeus and company. Hippolytus wrote after Irenaeus and identified the groups of heretics with their lineages and philosophies with the conclusion that the heresies had come out of Greek mythologies. Some of the issues involved: monotheism or polytheism; the Father Alone or the Father and Silence; the nature of Christ as one seeming to come and die or one who is very God and very man; as well as practices of meat-eating, fasting, sexual practices, and family life.

Indeed, were the Gnostics even the way the church fathers said they were, anyway? We have heard very little from the Gnostics themselves. The Nag Hammadi codices offer some insight.

Thus, to discuss point 3 listed above, namely that we are handicapped by very little witness from the Gnostics, some survey of Gnostic material that we do have is in order.

Prior to the Nag Hammadi discovery, we had only fragments of material from the Gnostics. Some material was embedded in the works of the church fathers such as the "Letter to Flora."

We have had the oldest literary work, the Corpus Hermeticum, a second and third century collection of Greek texts, some of which seemed to have been used by Gnostics.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Kurt Rudolph, Gnosis (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 25-26.



In 1778, the Codex Askewianus (The Askew Codex), discovered by the English physician Dr. Askew, and the Codex Brucianus (The Bruce Codex), discovered by James Bruce of Scotland, came to light. These gave us such Gnostic texts as "The Pistis Sophia" and "The Book of the Great Mysterious Logos." The Papyrus Berolinensis (The Berlin Codex) was presented in 1896 by C. Schmidt. The Berlin Codex, known by the number 8502, contains "The Gospel of Mary," "The Apocryphon of John," "The Sophia Jesu Christi," and "The Act of Peter." Events of WWI and WWII prevented the publication of the Berlin Codex. Walter Till was still working on it when the Nag Hammadi discovery was announced. He was able to consult parallel material and finally published the Berlin Codex in 1955, fifty-nine years after its discovery. Along with "The Odes of Solomon," "The Hymn of the Pearl," some apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and the Mandaean literature, all from the early centuries C.E., this material just about makes up our look at Gnostic texts until the discovery at Nag Hammadi.<sup>97</sup>

Henri Charles Puech described Nag Hammadi:

The Djebel-el-Tarif is a high cliff of chalk whose southern slope faces the bend formed by the Nile some sixty miles down stream from Luxor. With its white and bare wall it dominates a plain in which, on the left bank of the river, stands the hamlet of Nag Hammadi, while on the right are the fields of sugar-cane which surround the villages of Debba, El-Qasr and Es-Sayyad, on the very site of the ancient Shenesit-Chenoboskion where St. Pachomius founded his first monasteries in the fourth century.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 27, 30.

<sup>98</sup> Henre Charles Puech, The Jung Codex, ed. F. L. Cross (London: Mowbray, 1955), 13.

Puech goes on to say that the cliff turns to the north to look out upon the desert sand with numerous cavities once used as tombs. Some of these tombs were for pharaohs of the sixth dynasty and others were more modest tombs of the Greco-Roman time. It was here that Jean Doresse felt the codices were found in 1945. Peasants from Debba and Hamra-Doum were digging there in the rich soil and found the jar which contained the codices. Unfortunately some of the pages were burned. But the rest were eventually sold for three Egyptian pounds and brought to Cairo.<sup>99</sup>

A brief survey of the Nag Hammadi codices is:<sup>100</sup>

Codex I (The "Jung Codex")

1. Prayer of the Apostle Paul
2. Apocryphal Letter of James
3. Gospel of Truth
4. Treatise on the Resurrection
5. Tripartite Tractate

Codex II

1. The Apocryphon of John; three copies are in the Nag Hammadi Library, a fourth is in the Berlin Codex.
2. Gospel of Thomas
3. Gospel of Philip
4. Nature (Hypostasis) of the Archons
5. On the Origin of the World
6. Exegesis on the Soul
7. Thomas the Athlete (or Contender)

Codex III

1. Apocryphon of John (a shorter version than in Codex II)
2. Gospel of the Egyptians
3. Letter of the Blessed Eugnostus (also found in Codex V)
4. Sophia of Jesus Christ (also in Berlin Codex)
5. Dialogue of the Redeemer

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>100</sup> Rudolph, 44-48.

## Codex IV (in very poor preservation)

1. Apocryphon of John (a longer version)
2. Gospel of the Egyptians

## Codex V

1. Letter of the Blessed Eugnostus (less well preserved than the one in Codex III)
2. Apocalypse of Paul
3. Apocalypse of James (first tractate--dialogues between Jesus and James the Righteous)
4. Apocalypse of James (second tractate--the martyrdom of James)
5. Apocalypse of Adam, in which Adam hands his revelation to Seth

## Codex VI

1. Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles
2. Thunder: The Perfect Mind, revelation by the bisexual Wisdom
3. The Original Doctrine, a writing about the soul
4. The Thought (Noema) of Our Great Power, an apocalypse
5. Passage from Plato's "Republic"
6. A Dialogue between Hermes and Tat, not in Corpus Hermeticum
7. A Prayer, known already from the Corpus Hermeticum
8. Another text known from the Corpus Hermeticum on Asclepius

## Codex VII

1. Paraphrase of Shem
2. The Second Logos of the Great Seth
3. Apocalypse of Peter
4. Teachings of Silvanus
5. Three Stelae of Seth, a hymn in three parts purportedly delivered by Dositheos

## Codex VIII (very poorly preserved)

1. Teaching of Zostrianos
2. Letter of Peter to Philip

## Codex IX (existing in fragments only--after much work, three treatises have been identified)

1. Melchizedek
2. Ode About Norea
3. Testimony of Truth

## Codex X (also in poor condition; identification uncertain)

1. Marsanes, about parts of the soul and angels, seems similar to teachings of Marcus ↗

## Codex XI (also poorly preserved)

1. Interpretation of Knowledge (Gnosis)

2. Exposition of the Pleroma
3. Allogenes
4. The High-Minded (Hypsiphron), a fragmentary apocalypse

Codex XII (contains only ten pages and fifteen fragments)

1. Sentences of Sextus
2. (portion of) Gospel of Truth

Codex XIII (sixteen pages and a few fragments)

1. Trimorphic Protennoia, concerning Barbelo in her forms of father, mother, and son
2. The beginning ten lines of On the Origin of the World, found in Codex II

In looking over the actual codices and the titles in them, a few items stand out.

First, there is the frequency of the Apocryphon of John. Counting the Berlin Codex, there are four copies of the Apocryphon of John, of varying lengths. This might mean something of the importance of the Apocryphon.

Second, there are two copies or portions of two copies of some tractates: The Gospel of Truth, The Gospel of the Egyptians, Eugnostos the Blessed, On the Origin of the World, and The Sophia of Jesus Christ.

Third, the two tractates with Seth in the title are in the same codex, Codex VII: The Second Logos of the Great Seth, and The Three Steles of Seth. Thus, we might call Codex VII "The Seth Codex."

Fourth, there are five tractates with the title of Apocalypse in their names: Apocalypse of Paul, The First Apocalypse of James, The Second Apocalypse of James, The Apocalypse of Adam, and the Apocalypse of Peter--all but the last one are in Codex V. Thus, Codex V might be called "The Apocalypse Codex."

Fifth, Codex II contains the two tractates with Thomas in their titles: The Gospel of Thomas, and Thomas the Contender.

And six, The Gospel of Thomas had been known in part in The Oxyrhynchus Fragments. These were pieces of papyrus found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, by the British scholars Grenfell and Hunt in 1897 and 1904, published as P. Oxy. 1, 654 and 655, which were from three different Greek manuscripts. The first of these three different manuscripts give evidence of the importance of the copying of The Gospel of Thomas in ancient times and the importance of The Gospel as well.<sup>101</sup> It was not until after the codices were discovered at Nag Hammadi that it was found that indeed P. Oxy. 1, 654 and 655 were fragments of Thomas.<sup>102</sup>

The Gospel of Thomas offers many puzzles. It contains many sayings that are in the New Testament but that are in contexts that are new and unfamiliar and thus accorded with new and unfamiliar meanings.<sup>103</sup>

It thus reflects the way in which Gnostics were reported to have used material, that is, by combined materials from various sources and even rearrangements of them to bring out new effects. This manner, created out of an oscillation among sources, created also what was thought to be a garbling of the actual words of Jesus which concerned the church fathers very much.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Francis T. Fallon and Ron Cameron, "The Gospel of Thomas" MS (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 8-9.

<sup>102</sup> Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman, The Secret Sayings of Jesus (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 47-52.

<sup>103</sup> Pagels, xiii.

<sup>104</sup> Grant and Freedman, 93-95.

An example might be Saying 14:

Jesus said to them: If you fast, you will beget for yourselves a sin, and if you pray, you will be condemned, and if you give alms, you will do harm to your spirits. And if you go into every land, and travel in the regions, if they receive you, eat what they set before you. Heal the sick among them. For that which goes into your mouth will not defile you; but that which goes out of your mouth, that will defile. <sup>105</sup>

This saying relates to a common saying found in Matt. 9:14-15, Mark 2:18-20, and Luke 5:33-35 in which Jesus speaks about the fact there will not be fasting while he is there. Then the discussion of dietary laws in Luke 10:1-9 which refers to going out and eating what is set before one and healing the sick is related to Matt. 15:11, 17-18 and Mark 7:18-20 which discuss true defilement as being internal instead of external. <sup>106</sup>

One can ask if the writer really pulled parts here and there out of the Gospels and rearranged them along new lines of meaning, or if the Gospel writers were the ones to pull out lines from Thomas and/or other writings. Thomas seems to be rather pithy, as well as primitive. By primitive, I mean not developed. The material seems to be made with as few words as possible, not fleshed out, the way a cartoonist makes a picture with as few lines as possible. The sayings in Thomas, then, seem like "word cartoons"--and thus, perhaps, the ideas are exaggerated and work in the same way artistic cartoons, that is, by pithy exaggeration and a kind of satire.

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 134-135.

And they do appear, as Pagels suggests, like Zen koans.<sup>107</sup>

Irenaeus had made the same observation--namely that the Gnostics took material and reworked it by pulling lines from various sources. He accused the Gnostics of doing something similar to taking a jeweled mosaic of the portrait of a king, disassembling the mosaic, rearranging the jewels into the portrait of a fox or a dog, and maintaining it is still the portrait of the king.<sup>108</sup>

Irenaeus then presents a piece of composition written by the Gnostics from lines taken out of Homer: a line from the Odyssey, a line from the Iliad, and so on.<sup>109</sup> And anyone knowing the Odyssey and the Iliad can easily see that indeed bits and pieces of Homer are pulled out and used in the fashion Irenaeus discusses. The new composition does have an integrity of its own. And Irenaeus says those who did not know otherwise would not know but what this was the way it was composed in the first place.<sup>110</sup>

The same kind of composition turns up in the Gospel of Mark: "It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: Look, I am sending my messenger before you; he will prepare your way. A voice cried in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight."<sup>111</sup> But this is not the Prophet Isaiah. "Look, I am

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<sup>107</sup> Pagels.

<sup>108</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 5, 41.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Mark 1:2-3, JB.

going to send my messenger to prepare a way before me" is from Mal. 3:1.<sup>112</sup> When did Isaiah get the credit for all of it? The composition has a good integrity of its own. However, why did Mark write it this way? Was this added later? However, any who knew the Old Testament would know who said these lines. But as Irenaeus pointed out, the uninitiated would not know. This mixing of lines seems to be a type of writing, of which Thomas is included.

Even Clement of Alexandria combined diverse materials, as for instance, combining material from the Gospel of the Hebrews with material from Plato to a similar effect.<sup>113</sup>

At any rate, Thomas was not acceptable to the Church. In attempting to understand the Gnostic atmosphere in which Thomas was written and to how well Thomas reported the sayings of Jesus, it is necessary to look at other writers. Clement of Alexandria, referred to above, reported sayings from the Gospel of the Hebrews that were similar to sayings in Thomas. We do not have the Gospel of the Hebrews, except for some fragments; we can only rely on what little Clement said. The Gospel of the Hebrews seems to have laid great stress on James the Just, even to the point of naming him as the first witness to Jesus' resurrection.<sup>114</sup>

Further, Thomas seems related to The Gospel of Mary and The Gospel of the Egyptians, as well as the Bodmer Papyrus called Birth of Mary: Apocalypse of James, which is considered to be reflective

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<sup>112</sup> Mal. 3:1, JB.

<sup>113</sup> Grant and Freedman, 74.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 73-76.



of popular Christian piety of the second century, according to Robert Grant and David Noel Freedman.<sup>115</sup>

Grant and Freedman do not find Thomas to be Jewish or Jewish-Christian, even though in Thomas are Jewish expressions, some like those in rabbinic literature, and Tobit, as well as the Old Testament, and in spite of some seeming contact between Thomas and Jewish Christianity. Thomas seemed to have made use of The Gospel of the Egyptians, and both gospels seemed to have been in use in Egypt. Thomas contains ideas still in existence during the medieval period to the point that the Cathari heretics might well have been using Thomas if it was still around then. The Ophites had similar ideas to those in Thomas. Hippolytus seemed to refer to Thomas while citing a branch of the Ophites, the Naassenes, as using it. Thomas seems to have been known to the Manichaeans; indeed Cyril of Jerusalem said they wrote it. However, Origen's reference to Thomas proves it was pre-Manichaean. We have to wonder why, given the fact that Eusebius of Caesarea reported in the fourth century The Gospel of Thomas was rejected because it was attributed to heretics, the Didascalia Apostolorum, a third-century "Manual of Christian Discipline," reproduced Thomas Saying 49 exactly. Saying 49 is: "Jesus said: If two make peace with one another in the same house, they will say to the mountain, Move! and it will move."<sup>116</sup>

Grant and Freedman thus see Thomas as reflecting the Gnostic

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 77-93, 159.

atmosphere of the second and third centuries. <sup>117</sup> Yet we may ask whether Thomas might have reflected the Christian Church of the second and third centuries more than we have supposed. For if the conclusion could be drawn from the above that Thomas, The Gospel of Mary, The Gospel of the Egyptians, The Birth of Mary: Apocalypse of James, The Gospel of the Hebrews, and the Didascalia Apostolorum reflected second (and third) century "Christian piety," than all of these were more "orthodox" for their time perhaps than we have supposed and were possibly only later declared heretical as the nature of orthodoxy changed.

Grant and Freedman write that Thomas is based on the New Testament Gospels, mainly Matthew and Luke, yet with a stance much like John. It first emerged as a writing of the Naasenes, and had been an attempt to harmonize the sayings of Jesus. By the end of the second century, Thomas had been taken over and edited by the Gnostics. That Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas is related to the Biblical Jesus can be seen, but in Thomas he is more of a "Gnostic revealer of secret wisdom." <sup>118</sup>

It is, however, easy to feel uneasy about Grant and Freedman's conclusions of Thomas. It can be challenged whether Thomas is based on the Biblical Gospels. Could it have instead not been a work the canonical Gospels were themselves based on? Who used whom? Who perverted whom? Could both Thomas and the church canon not have been based on some other material we as yet know nothing of? And

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 116.

do we know the Jesus of Thomas was not the more real Jesus, "a revealer of secret wisdom"? We are so biased by our truth, we can see no other. How do we know that the orthodoxy that the church emerged into was not itself a distortion of the original faith that developed in the first century?

As Walter Bauer in 1934 in Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity wrote, in the diversities of the early Christian movements, what was orthodox and what was heresy constantly shifted--we need to understand the "heretics" in terms of their own time:

We can determine adequately the significance the "heretics" possessed for nascent and developing Christianity only when we, insofar as it is possible, place ourselves back into the period in which they went about their business, and without hesitation cast all our preconceived ideas aside. We must remain open to all possibilities. What constitutes "truth" in one generation can be out of date in the next--through progress, but also through retrogression into an earlier position. The actual situation in this region may not obtain in that one, and indeed, may never have had general currency.

Perhaps--I repeat, perhaps--certain manifestations of Christian life that the authors of the church renounce as "heresies" originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there, were the only form of the new religion--that is, for those regions they were simply "Christianity." 119

Thomas might lend insight. Of the texts found at Nag Hammadi, none has caused more discussion than The Gospel of Thomas. It seems to have been written in the second century C.E. and perhaps is older than The Apocryphon of John and The Book of Thomas the Contender. It contains older material that may indeed go back to the teachings of the historical Jesus. It is believed that Matthew and Luke were written after Mark and used both Mark and a source of sayings called

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<sup>119</sup> Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy, xxiii.

Q as part of their material. "Q" from the German word, Quelle, for "source," does not exist as a book, but can be reconstructed as a collection of sayings by a study of Matthew and Luke. Q appears as not a narrative gospel like Mark, but like a collection of sayings from Jesus much in form like The Gospel of Thomas. Both Q and Thomas portray Jesus as a teacher of wise sayings. In Thomas, the introduction to a saying is most often a stylized formula, "Jesus said." Yet, while Thomas might resemble Q, Thomas has been believed to have further edition and revision by Gnostic Christians.<sup>120</sup>

Saying 9 of The Gospel of Thomas is a variation of the familiar Parable of the Sower:

Jesus said, "Behold, the sower went out, took a handful of seeds, and scattered them. Some fell on the road, and the birds came and ate them. Others fell on rock, and they did not take root in the soil or produce any heads of grain. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns choked the seeds and worms consumed them. Still others fell on good soil, and brought forth a good crop: it yielded sixty per measure and one hundred twenty per measure."<sup>121</sup>

Yet in Thomas are details not found in the New Testament such as the fact that the sower took a "handful of seeds," but does not have the extended allegorical interpretations found in each of the New Testament gospels. It thus seems to be the case that Thomas shows the parable existed in an earlier form than we have known.<sup>122</sup>

More insight might be derived from the consideration of the

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<sup>120</sup> Marvin W. Meyer, The Secret Teachings of Jesus (New York: Random House, 1984), xviii, 125.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., xx.

Diatessaron by Tatian, Christian apologist of around 150-170 C.E., who combined the four Gospels into that of one work in an attempt to harmonize them.<sup>123</sup>

Gilles Quispel discusses Tatian's Diatessaron by comparing various aspects of it to Thomas. Tatian was a disciple of Justin Martyr, as stated earlier, until Justin died. Then Tatian joined the Encratites. There is some question as to whether Tatian composed the Diatessaron while still a follower of Justin or after he joined the Encratites. Various texts related to the Diatessaron exist in several languages. It is believed that Tatian inserted portions of the Gospel of the Hebrews into his work. The discovery of the Gospel of Thomas was a major breakthrough in research on the Diatessaron, for many of the sayings in Thomas have common variants with the Diatessaron, and thus a new dimension had been added in the search for the primitive copy of Tatian's work.<sup>124</sup>

For instance, the Thomas Saying 96 reads: "Jesus said: The Kingdom of the Father is like a woman, who has taken a little leaven and has hidden it in dough and has made large loaves of it. Whoever has ears let him hear."<sup>125</sup> The Venetian text of the Diatessaron reads: "Another parable he told them: The Kingdom of Heaven is similar to the leaven, which the woman takes and puts it in dough; the which leaven is small and it makes rise a great

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<sup>123</sup> Grant and Freedman, 29, 160.

<sup>124</sup> G. Quispel, Tatian and the Gospel of Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 19-28.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 51.

quantity of flour."<sup>126</sup> The version in Matt. 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21, considered to be a part of Q reads: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."<sup>127</sup> It is indeed curious, as Quispel is pointing out, that the version in Thomas is similar to the Diatessaron, whereas both are in degrees different than Q.

It is hard to know what to make of these three versions of the parable of the leaven. Is the Kingdom of the Father or of Heaven? Is the Kingdom like a woman or like leaven used by a woman? The Kingdom of the Father sounds more Gnostic. And it sounds more like Jesus, because Jesus talked much about the Father. Thomas and the Diatessaron agree about using dough. If the Diatessaron were written from Q or Matthew or Luke, why was "dough" used instead of "three measures of meal"? Yet, both Q and Thomas agree that the leaven was hidden instead of simply "put." On the other hand, Q with three measures of meal sounds very Gnostic--for one interpretation could be that Sophia is the woman and the three measures of meal are the three kinds of people: spiritual, psychic, and hylic. In any case, it looks certain that the Diatessaron had Thomas as one of its sources.

Quispel believes that Thomas is not Gnostic but Encratite.<sup>128</sup> This would follow if the view of the connection of Thomas with the

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>128</sup>Gilles Quispel, in discussion of his paper, "Gnostic Writings as Witness For the Development of the Saying Tradition," The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 1, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 260.

Diatessaron is correct, since Tatian is believed to have joined the Encratites eventually. This would add to the discussion of the dating of Thomas. While it is generally believed that Thomas was written in the second century, Helmut Koester believes Thomas is older, that it goes back to the first century.<sup>129</sup>

Thomas perhaps can tell us something, possibly much, of primitive Christianity in the first and second centuries. The very reasons the church fathers dismissed Thomas as heretical might be the reasons now that we should reinstate it.

It is of interest that much that can be said of The Gospel of Thomas can be said of other tractates from Nag Hammadi and that the codex containing The Gospel of Thomas as its second tractate contains The Book of Thomas the Contender as its final tractate. What relation do the Thomas books have to each other?

Codex II has 168 pages of which 20 pages make up The Gospel of Thomas. "Judging by its size and appearance it formed the prize of the collection," wrote H.E.W. Turner.<sup>130</sup>

The Book of Thomas the Contender, according to Meyer, was written later than The Gospel of Thomas with sayings of Jesus developed into discourses similar to the Gospel of John in the New Testament of the dialogue mode that appears to be derived from the Greek Platonic pattern.<sup>131</sup> The Book of Thomas the Contender thus

<sup>129</sup> Helmut Koester, introduction of "The Gospel of Thomas," The Nag Hammadi Library, ed., James M. Robinson, 117, and in discussion of "Gnostic Writings as Witness For the Development of the Sayings Tradition," in Layton, vol. 1, 250.

<sup>130</sup> Hugh Montefiore and H.E.W. Turner, Thomas and the Evangelists (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1962), 11.

<sup>131</sup> Meyer, xviii-xix.

is a dialogue between Jesus and Thomas which is overheard and written down by Matthew.<sup>132</sup>

The Savior said, "Brother Thomas, while you still have time in the world, listen to me and I shall explain what you have been reflecting upon in your mind. Since it is said that you are my twin and my true friend, examine yourself and understand who you are, how you live, and what will become of you. Since you are called my brother, you should not be ignorant about yourself. I know you understand some things, for already you understand that I am the knowledge of truth. While you are walking with me, though you are ignorant of other things, already you have obtained knowledge, and you will be described as one who knows self. For whoever does not know self does not know anything, but whoever knows self already has acquired knowledge about the depth of the universe. So, my brother Thomas, you have seen what is hidden from people, what they stumble over in their ignorance."<sup>133</sup>

Thomas then asks Jesus to tell him about the hidden things.

Jesus answers: "If what can be seen is obscure to you, how can you comprehend what cannot be seen?"<sup>134</sup>

A series of woes and blessings are included at the end of the book.<sup>135</sup> The Parable of the Grapevine and the Weeds (which might be a form of the story of the vines Severus presented) is found in the middle of them:

For if the sun does not shine on those bodies, they will waste away and die like weeds or grass. If the sun shines on weeds, they become vigorous and can choke a grapevine. But if a grapevine becomes vigorous, casts its shadow over the weeds and all the rest of the brush growing along with it, and spreads and flourishes, the grapevine alone inherits

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 48-50.



the land where it grows, and dominated wherever it casts its shadow. When it grows, then, it dominates the whole land, produces abundantly, and makes the lord even happier. For the lord would have suffered much because of these weeds before finally pulling them out, but the grapevine disposed of them and choked them all by itself. So the weeds died and became like earth. 136

The Book of Thomas ends with this benediction:

When you pray, you will find rest, for you have left pain and abuse behind. When you leave bodily pains and passions, you will receive rest from the Good One, and you will reign with the King, you united with the King and the King united with you, now and for ever and ever. Amen. 137

According to Marvin Meyer, books of the Nag Hammadi codices, among them The Book of Thomas the Contender and The Gospel of Thomas, may well reflect the actual sayings of Jesus of Nazareth. 138

A look at the complete book of Codex II brings the issue of why were these particular writings presented in a volume together. Is there a progression of some kind? Does The Apocryphon of John as the first tractate progress to some finale in The Book of Thomas the Contender?

Sandwiched between the Thomas tractates are The Gospel of Philip, which Wesley W. Isenberg finds to be Valentinian statements about ethics and sacraments and which talks a great deal about the "bridal chamber;" 139 The Hypostasis of the Archons, which deals with interpreting Gen. 1-6 and has parallels with the following tractate, On

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>139</sup> Wesley W. Isenberg, "The Gospel of Philip," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 131-151.

the Origin of the World; <sup>140</sup> On the Origin of the World, which discusses how the world and humankind began and will end; <sup>141</sup> and The Exegesis on the Soul, which is in the form of exhortation or like a sermon, on the fall and deliverance of the soul. <sup>142</sup>

Could Codex II have been a handbook given to an initiate, perhaps, with an introduction provided by The Apocryphon of John, a further discussion of teachings in The Gospel of Thomas, discussion on ethics and sacraments in The Gospel of Philip, writings on the Archons and on the origin of the World, a sermon on the Soul and a final summation in The Book of Thomas the Contender with its woes and blessings and final statement of being joined with the King forever? Looked at in this fashion, Codex II might be seen to be a complete entity.

Codex V contains four tractates with the word "Apocalypse" in the title. Starting with Eugnostos the Blessed as its first tractate, which appears to be a form of the same document as The Sophia of Jesus Christ, <sup>143</sup> here is discussed the super-celestial region that lies beyond this visible world. The book then moves into the apocalypses. The Apocalypse of Paul describes Paul's journey to

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<sup>140</sup> Roger A. Bullard and Bentley Layton, "The Hypostasis of the Archons," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 152-160.

<sup>141</sup> Hans-Gebhard Bethge and Orval S. Wintermute, "On the Origin of the World," Robinson, NHL, 161-179.

<sup>142</sup> William C. Robinson, Jr., "The Exegesis on the Soul," Robinson, NHL, 181-187.

<sup>143</sup> Douglas M. Parrott, "Eugnostos the Blessed and The Sophia of Jesus Christ," Robinson, NHL, 206-228.

the tenth heaven where he greeted his "fellow spirits."<sup>144</sup> The First Apocalypse of James is in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and James the Just about suffering and the ascent of the soul after death and the assurance that the soul will overcome all obstacles and return to the Preexistent Father.<sup>145</sup> The Second Apocalypse of James describes the suffering and death of James. It is thought the placement of the two tractates is intentional and reflects the complementary relationship to each other.<sup>146</sup> The last tractate in Codex V, The Apocalypse of Adam, is a revelation taught by Adam to his son Seth and presents a myth of the heavenly redeemer.<sup>147</sup>

The unifying theme of Codex V might be that it is a discussion of various descriptions of the heavenly gathering place of the souls beyond this world. A general description of the higher world, followed by the dialogue of Jesus and James, then by the account of the death of James, followed by the revelation from Adam to his son Seth--all would seem to assure the reader of the codex of one's own eventual place in the higher world.

The other apocalypse appears in the "Seth Codex," Codex VII, The Apocalypse of Peter. It is different in tone from the other

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<sup>144</sup> George W. MacRae, William R. Murdock, and Douglas M. Parrott, "The Apocalypse of Paul," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 239-241.

<sup>145</sup> William R. Schoedel and Douglas M. Parrott, "The First Apocalypse of James," Robinson, NHL, 242-248.

<sup>146</sup> Charles W. Hedrick and Douglas M. Parrott, "The Second Apocalypse of James," Robinson, NHL, 149-155.

<sup>147</sup> George W. MacRae and Douglas M. Parrott, "The Apocalypse of Adam," Robinson, NHL, 257-264.

four apocalypses.

Three visions are seen by Peter and interpreted by Jesus. The first vision is of the hostile priests and followers about to kill Jesus. In the second vision, the crucifixion takes place with Jesus standing to the side and laughing as a substitute is put in his place. The third vision is a resurrection scene where Jesus (who was apparently not killed in the first place) is united with the Pleroma. This apocalypse sees Jesus in a docetic sense. As the visions end, Pater comes "to himself" as if from a dream.<sup>148</sup>

Codex VII is very much a Sethian codex. It is the best preserved of all the codices in the Nag Hammadi collection. Tractate I is the Paraphrase of Shem. The Paraphrase of Seth, mentioned by Hippolytus, may have been a Christianized version of a work similar to the Paraphrase of Shem, which is non-Christian and uses Old Testament sources, especially from Genesis. According to Frederik Wisse, the Paraphrase of Shem is important to the study of Christian origins.<sup>149</sup>

The Paraphrase of Shem presents Shem in an out of body experience in which he is given understanding of the great Powers who were in the very beginning by a Derekeas. There were three roots of powers--Light, Darkness, and Spirit. At the end of the revelation he awoke as from a long sleep to view things in a different way.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> James Brashler, Roger A. Bullard, and Frederik Wisse, "Apocalypse of Peter," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 339-345.

<sup>149</sup> Frederik Wisse, "The Paraphrase of Shem," NHL, 309.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 310-328.

The Second Treatise of the Great Seth is seen as Christian and as Gnostic. It is a speech by Jesus about his beginning and nature. The name "Seth" is never presented except in the title. Seth and Jesus seem to be identified together. Jesus says he laughed as another was bearing the cross, was being struck, was given the crown of thorns, was nailed to the "tree." In fact, here, Jesus does a lot of laughing at the cosmocrator, at the "ludicrous" archons, at Adam who was "a laughingstock," as well as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, the prophets, and Moses.<sup>151</sup>

One wonders if this is the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, what happened to the First Treatise. The Jesus presented here is not the compassionate Jesus one has learned about in Sunday School. Not only does this Jesus call everybody a "laughingstock," but he is thoroughly arrogant, referring to himself as Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, who is exalted above the heavens, the friend of Sophia, who has "been in the bosom of the father from the beginning, in the place of the sons of the truth, and the Greatness."<sup>152</sup>

The third tractate of Codex VII is the Apocalypse of Peter.

The fourth tractate is the Teachings of Silvanus. It is seen to be the only non-Gnostic writing in Codex VII. It is considered to be early Christian Wisdom writing. "Silvanus" might refer to the Silvanus that went with Paul on some of his journeys. But of

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<sup>151</sup> Joseph A. Gibbons, Roger A. Bullard, and Frederik Wisse, "The Second Treatise of the Great Seth," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 329-338.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 337-338.

course it was common to use a New Testament name when writing at that time.<sup>153</sup>

The tractate is a series of sayings, somewhat of the form of the Sermon on the Mount.

Of the sayings, are some examples:

"Do not become a sausage (made) of many things which are useless. . . ." <sup>154</sup>

"O my son, strip off the old garment of fornication, and put on the garment which is clean and shining that you may be beautiful in it." <sup>155</sup> This might be compared to Rev. 7:13-14: "Then one of the elders addressed me, saying 'Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?' I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" <sup>156</sup>

Also from the Teachings of Silvanus: "Let Christ alone enter your world, and let him bring to naught all powers which have come upon you. Let him enter the temple which is within you so that he may cast out all the merchants. Let him dwell in the temple which is within you, and may you become for him a priest and a Levite,

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<sup>153</sup> Malcolm L. Peel, Jan Zandee, and Frederik Wisse, "The Teachings of Silvanus," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 346-361.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>156</sup> Rev. 7:13-14, RSV.

entering in purity." <sup>157</sup>

The fifth tractate in Codex Vii is the Three Steles of Seth, another Seth writing. The work is divided into three parts, each labeled with the number of the stele dealt with, and starts: "The revelation of Dositheos about the three steles of Seth, the father of the living and unshakable race, which he (Dositheos) saw and understood." The three divisions of the writing seem to correspond to the threefold nature of God as well as the three stages of the ecstatic rise of the worshipper during the liturgy which might be part of a worship service. The steles have such praises as "Thou are perfect! Thou art perfect! Thou art perfect!" and "We give thanks! We bless always! We shall glorify thee!" A scribal note on the last page seems to close off the codex as a whole: "This book belongs to the fatherhood. It is the son who wrote it. Bless me, O father. I bless you, O father, in peace. Amen." <sup>158</sup>

Taken as a complete entity, Codex VII raises questions. As with Codex II, one can ask what relationship these tractates have to each other: The Paraphrase of Shem, which might be a version of the Paraphrase of Seth mentioned by Hippolytus (Does it have anything to do with Shem, the son of Noah from whom Abraham and thus Jesus were descended--Gen. 10-11?); The Second Treatise of the Great Seth, which is a revelation presented by Jesus, who might be identified with Seth; The Apocalypse of Peter, which is a series of

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<sup>157</sup> Peel, Zandee, and Wisse, in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 357.

<sup>158</sup> James M. Robinson and Frederik Wisse, "The Three Steles of Seth," NHL, 362-367.

visions seen by Peter and interpreted by Jesus; The Teachings of Silvanus, which presents a series of wisdom sayings; and The Three Steles of Seth, which appears to be a type of liturgical worship of praise. It can be seen to offer a devotional book--a work dealing with Shem, a revelation of the Great Seth (Jesus), an apocalyptic work of Peter, wisdom sayings, with a liturgical hymn-like work to end it.

Sethianism is an important rubric in the study of Gnosticism.

During March 28-31, 1978, an international Conference on Gnosticism was held at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut.

Bentley Layton concluded at the end of the preface he wrote for the proceedings of the Yale Conference that the publication of the codices from Nag Hammadi overcomes the lack of first-hand "documentation" by the Gnostics and the "deliberate, if well-meaning, obfuscation on the part of their ancient opponents." The Nag Hammadi material will help us to see the Gnostic morphology development, as well as its ways of interaction with other schools of thought of the time and its place in society. Layton said that "Although the diversity of Gnosticism was perhaps as great as that of its non-Gnostic counterpart," the Nag Hammadi material indicates that early Gnosticism existed in two main types: Sethianism, which was a parody of Judaism and non-Christian; and Valentinianism, which was "an allegorical trope upon Catholicism." Both types may have met in Valentinus who was said by ancient writings to have been influenced by the first one and to have founded the other. Layton ended by saying: "The exact historical relationship of these two varieties of Gnosticism, and the dialectic of Gnosticism, Cathol-



icism, the Marcionites, Middle Platonism, and the religion of Mani, are questions that now lie before us. The papers of this conference will lay a solid and important groundwork for that historical inquiry." <sup>159</sup>

Robert Kraft reported at the Yale Conference on the Jewish traditions known from Josephus that material concerned with Seth had been inscribed on two steles for preservation through a great destruction. Seth had represented healing (in Greek, ἰατρῆς), to restore Adam's fall, as Jesus does in Christian tradition, and by so doing represented a new beginning for humanity, an ancestor of Noah, who through Shem was an ancestor of Abraham and Moses. <sup>160</sup>

It can be wondered if the nominative word for healing, ἰατρῆς, has any relationship to ἰησους, "Jesus," a Greek form for the Messiah, the "Savior"--also referring to "healing" and "salvation."

Bentley Layton, in saying that the Nag Hammadi codices show the existence of two main directions in Gnosticism--Sethianism and Valentinianism--is nevertheless contradicted by Frederik Wisse in the Yale Conference paper, "Stalking Those Elusive Sethians." It had been Jean Doresse, who was the first to write about the Nag Hammadi codices, who had first thought the codices were of a Sethian library, an estimation that for some time had remained unquestioned. Wisse raised the question as to whether there was ever a gnostic sect that could be called the Sethians and concluded that from the writings

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<sup>159</sup> Layton, vol. 2, xii, hereafter referred to as RG, vol. 2.

<sup>160</sup> Robert Kraft, "Philo on Seth," RG, vol. 2, 457-458.

from the church fathers, even though Seth was an important figure, evidence is not present to say that a definite group called Sethians existed.<sup>161</sup>

Against the viewpoint of Wisse, Hans-Martin Schenke, although he agrees that it is not very possible to identify a sect of Sethians from the church fathers, sees "a constellation of texts that clearly stand apart" to indicate a defined group of Sethian Gnostics: The Apocryphon of John, The Hypostasis of the Archons, The Gospel of the Egyptians, The Apocalypse of Adam, The Three Steles of Seth, Zostrianus, Melchizedek, The Thought of Norea, Marsanes, Allogenes, and The Trimorphic Protennoia.<sup>162</sup>

Wisse has listed a number of the characteristics that he has seen Schenke describe as those of Sethian texts: (1) they are the seed of Seth, (2) Seth is the heavenly-earthly savior of this seed, (3) there are four lights that are in the heavenly dwelling place of Adam, Seth, and the seed of Seth--Harmozel, Oriael, Daveithe, and Eleleth, (4) there is a heavenly trinity of the Father, Mother (Barbelo), and Son (Autogenes or Anthropos), (5) the seed of Seth are under threat of destruction by the evil Demiurge Yaldabaoth, (6) there are three divisions of history with a savior in each. But Wisse does not find that the texts listed by Schenke have these characteristics to an overall enough degree to find any group again

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<sup>161</sup> Frederik Wisse, "Stalking Those Elusive Sethians" Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 2, 563-576.

<sup>162</sup> Hans-Martin Schenke, "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism," RG, vol. 2, 588-616.

that can be called the Sethians.<sup>163</sup>

Birger Pearson concluded that the gnostic writings about Seth seem to come from Jewish sources so that therefore Sethian Gnosticism came from Jewish or pre-Christian sources. He denotes the tradition that Cain and Abel were children of Eve and the devil and that Seth was the real son of Adam.<sup>164</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the P document of the early part of Genesis that Seth was the son (apparently first born) of Adam in Adam's own likeness as Adam was in God's own likeness. P knows no traditions of the Garden of Eden, Eve, the serpent, Cain or Abel. All those stories are J material. P devotes considerable material to the story of the flood and the tracing of Seth, Shem, Abraham and Moses as descendents.<sup>165</sup>

It is possible that the effects of this P material should be more thoroughly traced. Can Gnostic Sethianism be a tradition from P? Is it not possible that not all parties accepted the alleged intermixing of P, J, E, D, as one document any more than modern people all accept the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation of the Bible? From such purists as held to the P materials, if they did, some Sethian traditions might have emerged. And it must

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<sup>163</sup> Wisse, Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 2.

<sup>164</sup> Birger A. Pearson, "Seth in Gnostic Literature" RG, vol. 2, 472-504.

<sup>165</sup> Isaac Asimov, In the Beginning. . . (New York: Crown, 1981), 219-227. This source has an account of P written out.

be possible that some saw the interjection of J material with its stories of Eve, Cain, Abel and the other stories as indications of the Demiurge.

We can probably trust the church fathers when they spoke about "Sethians." As Wisse brings out, such names used by the church fathers probably were not the names used by any sects themselves.<sup>166</sup> Such names were probably used in derision. The name "Christians" was first used in derision--early Christians simply called themselves Followers of the Way. Methodists were first called by that name in a derisive fashion by outsiders. Disciples of Christ were called "Campbellites." Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints are called "Mormons." The list could go and on. But in each case, there is a group that is distinctive enough to come under such a rubric. So we can in good possibility probably follow the church fathers in their lead in that there was some group or group of groups that could be called "Sethians."

But perhaps Codex VII offers us a clue to the Sethians we have not looked at before. Codex VII is distinctive by having two tractates with "Seth" as part of the title (as is Codex II by having "Thomas" as part of the title in two tractates). Since a tractate with "Shem" in the title is along with two tractates with "Seth," we can ask if any of them has any connection with each other or with Shem. The compiler of the codex must have thought so. And Seth the son of Adam is the ancestor of Shem the son of Noah. Both Adam and Noah are progenitors of humankind. Both Seth and Shem are

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<sup>166</sup> Wisse, Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol 2, 563.

their sons. Possibly the Paraphrase of Seth referred to by Hippolytus is related to the Paraphrase of Shem--they seem similar with three principles of the universe, as well as wind, serpent, water, light, and darkness. Wisse has emphasized that throughout the tractate, "Shem" is the same used.<sup>167</sup> This work is not on Schenke's list.

The Second Treatise of the Great Seth, the second tractate in Codex VII, is a puzzle. As stated before, it contains no mention of Seth except in the title. It also contains some factors that seem Valentinian, as defined by Irenaeus--Sophia, the Pleroma, the Monad, the Ogdoad, the Ennoia, the Hebdomad, the Archons, Nous, among others. Gibbons sees some aspects from Basilides, especially the substitution of Simon of Cyrene for Jesus who laughed at the crucifixion. Yaldabaoth and Adam are elements of Sethiansim.<sup>168</sup> Nor is this on Schenke's list.

The Apocalypse of Peter, third tractate in Codex VII, has in common with the previous one that it is mostly spoken by Jesus and tells again of Jesus laughing while a substitute dies on the cross. James Brashler finds it to be one that discusses the emerging orthodoxy and heresy disagreements of the time.<sup>169</sup>

The fourth tractate in Codex VII is the Teachings of Silvanus.

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<sup>167</sup> Wisse, "The Paraphrase of Shem," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 308. Hereafter referred to as NHL.

<sup>168</sup> Gibbons, Bullard, and Wisse, "The Second Treatise of the Great Seth," NHL, 329-338.

<sup>169</sup> Brashler, Bullard, and Wisse, NHL, 339-345.

The fourth tractate in Codex VII is the Three Steles of Seth.

Codex VII might offer insight. Having already sketched out that it might be a devotional book, ending with a mighty hymn to Seth, can it be seen to show something about "Sethians"? If so, obviously they were concerned with figures other than Seth. Shem was important, whoever Shem might be for the composer of Codex VII, whether Noah's son or some other Shem was indicated. Was this book a "graded" book, second in a series, with "The First Treatise of the Great Seth" in book I? Or was the Paraphrase of Shem the first treatise? The intriguing question persists, where was the First Treatise? Whoever it was to whom Codex VII belonged, Sethians or otherwise, was interested in apocalypticism. And there was a strong docetic quality, for in two tractates, the Apocalypse of Peter and the Second Treatise, Jesus relates he laughed while another was put on the cross. If Sethians saw history in three stages with a savior for each stage, perhaps here are Seth, Shem, and Jesus as saviors of three stages.

Codex VII was published in 1971 in the Facsimile Edition in the Coptic text. At the International Colloquium on Gnosticism in Stockholm in August 20-25, 1973, Martin Krause wrote on the Paraphrase of Shem:

Selbst diese, „Paraphrase des Seth“ muß nicht identisch sein mit der uns erhaltenen, „Paraphrase des Sêem“. Es ist angenommen worden, daß ein Schreibfehler vorliegt, aber der Name CHEM wird 25 mal in derselben Schreibung in dieser Schrift verwendet. Der Name Seth begegnet nicht in dieser Schrift, sondern in Codex VII nur im 2. und 5. Traktat: in der 2. Schrift nur im nachgesetzten Titel (70, 12) **δεύτερος λόγος τοῦ μεγάλου Ἰησ** und in der 5. Schrift, den, „Drei Stelen des Seth“, siebenmal, sechsmal im vor- bzw. nachgestellten Titel und einmal

im Text: ~~EMM~~ ~~XXX~~ CHΘ (128, 28). Das heißt, in Codex VII wird zwischen CHEM und CHΘ unterschieden. Daß eine Identität der Namen Seem und Seth vorliegt--wie Wisse unter Verweis auf Augustin annimmt--ist mir zweifelhaft. Bei Augustin ist Sêem nämlich der Sohn Noahs, in der „Paraphrase des Sêem“ aber ist Sêem nicht der alttestamentliche Sêm, Sohn des Noah, sondern ein Wesen, das--wie es in unserem Text (1, 19) heißt--aus einer reinen Kraft stammt, der ZuerstSeiende auf Erden ist (1, 20-21). 170

James Robinson, at the Stockholm Conference, traced a common hymn and cult tradition connecting the tractates of the Three Steles of Seth, Allogenes in Codex XI, and Zostrianos in Codex VIII. Allogenes does not refer to Seth, but has similar language to the Three Steles of Seth--such as "another race" which is "over another race" and "triple power." The Three Steles of Seth does appear to be a hymn while Allogenes is a revelation, but with a three part division reminiscent of the three part Steles of Seth. In Zostrianos Seth is referred to as the Son of Adamas as well as Emmacha Seth, as he is in the Steles of Seth. There is a reference to three tablets written by Zostrianos as well as "triple power" again. Allogenes and Zostrianos have similarities such as the same kind of hymnic praise. 171

Of the tractates put forth by Schenke as Sethian, a look at the Nag Hammadi codices brings this: no Sethian material is seen in Codex I; Codex II, the "Thomas Codex," has two Sethian tractates,

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<sup>170</sup> Geo Widengren, ed., "Die Paraphrase des Seem und der Bericht Hippolyts," by Martin Krause, in Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 101-110.

<sup>171</sup> James M. Robinson, "The Three Steles of Seth and The Gnostics of Plotinus," in Widengren, 132-142.

the Apocryphon of John and the Hypostasis of the Archons; Codex III has two Sethian tractates, the Apocryphon of John and the Gospel of the Egyptians; Codex IV, containing only two tractates, has the same two that begin the previous codex, the Apocryphon of John and the Gospel of the Egyptians; Codex V has one Sethian tractate, the Apocalypse of Adam; Codex VI has no Sethian material; Codex VII has the Three Steles of Seth; Codex VIII, with only two tractates, has Zostrianos as Sethian; Codex IX, with three tractates, has two that are Sethian, Melchizedek and the Thought of Norea; Codex X has only one tractate, the Sethian one of Marsanes; Codex XI, which has as its second tractate the one entitled A Valentinian Exposition, has the Sethian Allogenes as its third tractate; Codex XII has no Sethian material; Codex XIII, with two tractates, has the Sethian Trimorphic Protennoia. The Berlin Codex 8502 has the Apocryphon of John which is included with the Sophia of Jesus Christ as it is also in Codex III.

Of the Sethian material that is so classed, I find questions emerge. For instance, if Allogenes is a Sethian tractate, why is it in a codex, namely Codex XI, in which material thought to be Valentinian is found, if Sethianism and Valentinianism are two different strains of Gnosticism? And why is other "Sethian" material found among Valentinian material, such as in Codex II where the Gospel of Philip, thought to be Valentinian (see footnote 140) is found with the Hypostasis of the Archons, thought by Schenke to be Sethian?

I must come to the view that it is not so easy to separate out two distinct streams of Gnosticism--of Sethianism and Valentinianism.



While I would believe the church fathers saw groups, we cannot be sure how clearly they did so or how clearly we understand what they saw. For example, would historians a thousand years from now realize that Disciples of Christ and Campbellites are the same group? Or that Friends and Quakers are the same? Or of the relationship between Methodism and The Salvation Army? The relationship between Sethianism and Valentinianism must be more complex than we have seen.

Codex I, containing no Sethian material, might appear to be Valentinian.

Beginning Codex I is a short tractate on the flyleaf called the Prayer of the Apostle Paul. As well as appearing to be Valentinian, it bears resemblances to prayers in the Corpus Hermeticum, as well as magical texts, and to the first hymn of the Steles of Seth.<sup>172</sup> In some ways, this prayer resembles the Lord's Prayer in that the supplication to oneness and protection with and by the Redeemer as well as reference to the glory and power for ever and ever are present.<sup>173</sup>

The second tractate of Codex I, the Apocryphon of James, is seen as a letter, perhaps addressed to "Cerinthos" by James. Even though a letter, it presents a dialogue between Jesus with James and Peter. To some scholars, it seems to present ideas that are Valentinian.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Dieter Mueller, "The Prayer of the Apostle Paul," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 27.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>174</sup> Francis E. Williams and Dieter Mueller, "The Apocryphon of James," NHL, 29.

Fourth in Codex I is the Treatise on Resurrection, written in letter form to a "Rheginos." Containing Valentinian symbols, it is considered by some scholars to have been written by Valentinus himself. However, most scholars feel it was written by a late second century Christian Gnostic who was perhaps influenced by Valentinus, but was closer to Paul than to Valentinus.<sup>175</sup>

Fifth in Codex I is a long tractate that closes the codex, the Tripartite Tractate, so named because of the three portions it is made of, but which is otherwise untitled. The tractate is a long history of the origin and destiny of the universe. Containing some Valentinian language, it nevertheless differs from Valentinus in some ways. The first part describes the Father, who is the depth as well as the abyss and the Unengendered One, as well as a Sophia-like myth of the Logos. The second part draws upon Genesis to relate the creation of humankind into three types of beings. The third part relates how the Savior came into the world to save people, restore the church, and bring all things to the Father.<sup>176</sup>

Third in Codex I is the Gospel of Truth, believed by many to be the Valentinian gospel "gospel of truth" written about by Irenaeus. The Gospel of Truth is found twice in the Nag Hammadi codices. It is given the name because of its opening line: "The gospel of truth is a joy for those who have received from the Father of truth

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<sup>175</sup> Malcolm L. Peel, "The Treatise on Resurrection," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 50.

<sup>176</sup> Harold W. Attridge, Elaine Pagels, and Dieter Mueller, "The Tripartite Tractate," NHL, 54.

the gift of knowing him, through the power of the Word that came forth from the pleroma--the one who is in the thought and the mind of the Father, that is, the one who is addressed as the Savior, (that) being the name of the work he is to perform for the redemption of those who were ignorant of the Father, while the name (of) the gospel is the proclamation of hope, being discovery for those who search for him."<sup>177</sup>

Found in Codex I and in Codex XII, the Gospel of Truth is not seen as a gospel in the same sense as the New Testament Gospels are. It does not concern itself with the words and acts of the historical Jesus, as do the New Testament Gospels, but does present the "gospel"--the "good news" of Jesus as the Word who reveals the Father and the knowledge of self-understanding. "Ignorance of the Father brought about anguish and terror," says the Gospel of Truth. "And the anguish grew solid like a fog so that no one was able to see." Name and Call and Dreams are important in this gospel. Those ignorant of the Father are like those who, having bad dreams, dream of being chased or receiving blows, of falling from high places or of taking off through the air "though they do not even have wings." But when they wake up, "they see nothing, they who were in the midst of all these disturbances, for they are nothing. Such is the way of those who have cast ignorance aside from them like sleep, not esteeming it as anything, nor do they esteem its words as solid things either, but they leave them behind like a dream in the night."<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> George W. MacRae, "The Gospel of Truth," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 37-38.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 37-43.

Werner Foerster wrote that the literary style of the Gospel of Truth is that of a homily or sermon. "The speaker repeatedly turns to his hearers and readers, whom he addresses in the second person plural. Sometimes he includes himself and refers to 'us,' or he refers only to himself. He never tires of illuminating that which he preaches from different angles." Foerster continued that the preacher gives reasons and comparisons, questions that he answers, and demands that his readers or his hearers render some activity for which they will be rewarded and other activities he prohibits.<sup>179</sup>

Foerster also wrote that comparison of the Gospel of Truth with what has been considered the Valentinian system shows some differences. Absent are the thirty Aeons, the fall of Sophia, and the three classes of persons. But there are agreements: the part played by Error, the idea of darkness, the incorruptibility of the flesh of the Savior, the rest for the pneumatics, the seeking of the Aeons for the Father, and the Pleroma. The work, Foerster feels, if not the work of Valentinus himself, at least is from a school of Valentinians.<sup>180</sup>

Codex I, then, might seem to be the most Valentinian of the Nag Hammadi collection.

The other codex containing the Gospel of Truth, namely Codex XII, is in very bad shape containing only fragments and only a portion of the Gospel of Truth, along with the Sentences of Sextus, also in poor shape.

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<sup>179</sup> Werner Foerster, Gnosis, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 53.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

The Sentences of Sextus has been known from Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian and Greek versions. It is a collection of wisdom sayings and was popular in Christian groups.<sup>181</sup> That it is in the same codex as the Gospel of Truth is very interesting.

Little can be said about the fragments found in Codex XII, entitled "Fragments," in The Nag Hammadi Library, except that perhaps the speaker might be Jesus since there is reference to "my Father." It is not known whether these fragments represent one or more than one tractate. A few words stand out: "strangers," and "ignorance" and "know" and "error."<sup>182</sup> Could this collection of fragments be from a Valentinian tractate? If so, it might mean the whole codex is Valentinian.

The Yale Conference dealt with Valentinianism.

At Yale, G. C. Stead reported that while we have valuable new insights of Valentinianism, we are still faced with obscurity about Valentinus himself. The fragments we have from Valentinus by way of such people as Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus, when taken by themselves, would seem to be of what Stead calls "a Platonizing biblical theologian" who was close to the Christian orthodoxy of that time. The Valentinian system may have borrowed from an already developed mythology whose description is found in the Apocryphon of John. It is hard to date these systems. There are elements in Valentinianism which seem to parallel Platonism, such as the

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<sup>181</sup> Frederik Wisse, "The Sentences of Sextus," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 454.

<sup>182</sup> Frederik Wisse, "Fragments," NHL, 460.

concept of demiurge. The Tripartite Tractate gives an account of the Valentinian system that is without the biases of the church fathers.<sup>183</sup>

Ugo Bianchi pointed out that a basic part of Valentinianism concerns Sophia--her desires, curiosity, and errors. A second basic concern is the Demiurge--the ways he is both like and unlike the Biblical Yahweh; for the Demiurge is the offspring of Sophia as well as being one of the angels. Another basic stance is that the Savior is docetic.<sup>184</sup> Therefore, we can perhaps conclude that if we can see these at work, the text is Valentinian.

Elaine Pagels challenged the view of a docetic Christ by saying that the Gospel of Truth and the Tripartite Tractate, especially, showed that Jesus suffered, was "nailed to a tree," and was "slain." Indeed, it was not a docetic Christ, according to Pagels, but a Christ of two natures that was at issue--an issue that would be taken up by the church fathers two centuries later.<sup>185</sup> Did the Gnostics anticipate Chalcedon as early as the second century?

Barbara Aland pointed out in the discussion of her paper, "Gnosis und Christentum, "that for Gnostics and for the Gospel of Truth, Christ's body that was crucified was only the ~~πλάσμα~~ πλάσμα (plasma) of

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<sup>183</sup> G. C. Stead, "In Search of Valentinus," in Layton, Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol 1, 75-95.

<sup>184</sup> Ugo Bianchi, "Religio-Historical Observations on Valentinianism," RG, vol. 1, 103-108.

<sup>185</sup> Elaine Pagels, "Gnostic and Orthodox Views of Christ's Passion: Paradigms for the Christian's Response to Persecution?" RG, vol. 1, 161-163.

the fallen Sophia. Further, death is not the death of the physical body, but by the fact of not knowing God. This, of course, differs from any orthodox Christian doctrine.<sup>186</sup>

R. McL. Wilson reported on the early idea that to combine the Gospel of Truth with the Apocryphon of John would produce the Valentinian system. However, the Gospel of Truth has no Aeons, no Demiurge, with the primary sin not that of the fall of Sophia, but that of not having self-knowledge. There is a difference between the Gospel of Truth and what has been reported as Valentinianism. The Gospel of Truth seems to have been written at an early date, perhaps around 150 C.E. Wilson feels that Nag Hammadi shows the various groups of Gnostics were not isolated from one another, but borrowed from each other and interchanged documents.<sup>187</sup>

Other tractates of which there are more than one include: On the Origin of the World, the Gospel of the Egyptians, Eugnostos the Blessed, and the Sophia of Jesus Christ, as well as the Apocryphon of John.

On the Origin of the World is highly interesting because it seems to draw upon Sethian, Valentinian, and Manichaean themes. It also seems to have some connection with the previous tractate, the Hypostasis of the Archons. Hans-Gebhard Bethge writes: "This text provides insight into the thought, methodology, and argument-

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<sup>186</sup> Barbara Aland, in discussion of "Gnosis und Christentum," Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 1, 343-344.

<sup>187</sup> R. McL. Wilson, "Valentinianism and The Gospel of Truth," RG, vol. 1, 133-138.

ation of a Gnostic author presenting to the public at large certain information of the origin and end of the world and of man." Bethge continues that this tractate also indicates how the writer utilized the freedom and skill with materials highly diverse in character-- "all in the service of Gnostic proclamation."<sup>188</sup>

The Gospel of the Egyptians is found as the second tractate in Codex III as well as the second tractate in Codex IV, in both cases following the Apocryphon of John. Codex IV has only the two tractates.

Further, both tractates of the Gospel of the Egyptians exist in slightly different versions. This is a Sethian tractate presenting the origin of the heavenly world, the Great Invisible Spirit; the trinity of Father, Mother Barbelo, and Son; the pleroma of heavenly powers; the coming of Seth, Son of Adamas, who is the Savior who puts on Jesus like a garment to save his children.<sup>189</sup>

Eugnostos the Blessed and the Sophia of Jesus Christ are in Codex III as the third and fourth tractates. In addition, Eugnostos the Blessed is found in Codex V as the first tractate, and the Sophia of Jesus Christ is found in The Berlin Codex as the third tractate. According to Douglas M. Parrott, both works are versions of the same original. He has presented both in parallel fashion to be compared in The Nag Hammadi Library. Parrott finds a connec-

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<sup>188</sup> Bethge and Wintermute, "On the Origin of the World," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 161.

<sup>189</sup> Alexander Bohlig and Frederik Wisse, "The Gospel of the Egyptians," NHL, 195.



tion between the two tractates in Codex III at the end of Eugnostos the Blessed.<sup>190</sup>

There is some area of importance in the fact these two tractates are put together in Codex III and that there are copies of each. Eugnostos the Blessed does seem to be the original work with the Sophia of Jesus Christ the second and flushed out version. At least, this seems indicated by looking at the two copies together.

The Apocryphon of John, in differing versions, has come to us in four copies--three from the Nag Hammadi find and one that was known from The Berlin Codex. So many copies seem to testify to its vast importance in Gnostic literature.

The Apocryphon of John is the first tractate in the Codices found at Nag Hammadi that it is in--namely, Codices II, III, and IV. It is the second tractate in The Berlin Codex. In Codices III and IV, it precedes the Gospel of the Egyptians. Schenke sees the Apocryphon as Sethian.

W. C. van Unnik wrote that the Apocryphon of John seems to be composed of several smaller parts:

Now strikingly enough, the second part of our Apocryphon is different from the first in both style and structure; this can be seen, for example, in the use of the dialogue-form, which is absent from the first part. This suggests, in my opinion, that the Apocryphon of John is not all of a piece, but is compounded of a number of different pieces.<sup>191</sup>

This fact might be behind the varying versions of the Apocryphon

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<sup>190</sup> Parrott, "Eugnostos the Blessed and The Sophia of Jesus Christ," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 206-228.

<sup>191</sup> W. C. van Unnik, Newly Discovered Gnostic Writings (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1960), 71.

of John.

According to Marvin Meyer, the Apocryphon of John contains little, if any, material that goes back to the historical Jesus. Instead, the tractate seems to be a creation myth in a Christianized version of an early Jewish text based mostly on Genesis. Greek philosophy is intertwined.<sup>192</sup>

Even though the Apocryphon of John is seen by Schenke as Sethian, it yet has elements of Valentinianism.

The tractate begins: "The teaching of the savior and the revelation of the mysteries and the things hidden in silence, all these things which he taught John, his disciple."<sup>193</sup>

While contemplating, John saw the heavens open and the world was shaken. Then a youth in a light stood beside him. The youth became an old man and then a likeness with multiple forms.<sup>194</sup> This part is like Revelation.

The multiple forms, appearing through each other, resulted in a likeness of three forms as the Father, Mother, and Son.<sup>195</sup> This part is therefore Sethian. The divine Autogenes, Barbelo, and the light-aeons, Armozel, Oriel, Daveithai, and Eleleth are present in the story.<sup>196</sup> Also Sethian.

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<sup>192</sup> Meyer, xx-xxi.

<sup>193</sup> Frederik Wisse, "The Apocryphon of John," in Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 99.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

Yet, this seems Valentinian:

And the Sophia of the Epinoia, being an aeon, conceived a thought from herself with the reflection of the invisible Spirit and fore-knowledge. She wanted to bring forth a likeness out of herself without the consent of the Spirit --and he had not approved--and without her consort and without his consideration. 197

This also seems Valentinian:

And when the mother recognized that the cover of darkness was imperfect, then she knew that her consort had not agreed with her. She repented with much weeping. And the whole pleroma heard the prayer of her repentance and they praised on her behalf the invisible, virginal Spirit. And he consented; and when the invisible Spirit had consented, the holy Spirit poured over her from their whole fullness. For her consort had not come to her, but he came to her through the pleroma in order that he might correct her deficiency. And she was taken up not to her own aeon but above her son, that she might be in the ninth until she has corrected her deficiency. 198

Meyer points out that a portion toward the end of the tractate, which he calls "Hymn of the Savior," is a separate section of the work and contained only in the longer versions. Christ is the Savior who, in descending into this world, may be compared to Christ descending into hell in early Christian doctrine. 199

Hans Jonas points to that ending, which he says is "tacked on":

The appended ending is a self-account by a saving deity of her descent into the depth of Darkness, to awaken Adam: its particular gnostic parentage is readily identified by such passages as "I penetrated to the midst of the prison. . . and I said 'Let him who hears wake up from heavy slumber!'" 200

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>199</sup> Meyer, 118.

<sup>200</sup> Jonas, 306.

Danielou points to the importance of the Apocryphon of John as indicated by the three copies of it in the Nag Hammadi library by further saying:

The comparison of the text with Irenaeus' account of it has shown that chapter 29 of Book I, devoted to the Barbelognostics, is a very faithful summary of the first part of the Apocryphon. The work summarised by Irenaeus in chapter 30, in which he gives us the teaching of the Ophites, is in its second half influenced by the Apocryphon. 201

Danielou further says, "The interesting point of a comparison with the Apocryphon is that it demonstrates the progressive christianisation of a Gnosticism that was at first almost purely Jewish." 202

Danielou finds texts like the Apocryphon of John to be Sethian and dating from the middle of the second century from material going to much earlier times, possibly to the time of the Apostles. That material is therefore Jewish Christian literature and Jewish Christian Gnosis. In turn, Jewish Christian Gnosis had points common with Valentinianism. For it is felt that Valentinus received his material from Egyptian Gnosis which developed from old Jewish Christian Gnosticism. Valentinus borrowed from this Egyptian Gnosis and from orthodox Jewish Christian theology. But the system he built was in another sphere altogether. 203

Gilles Quispel has dated the Apocryphon of John to a period earlier than Valentinus. 204

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201 Danielou, 77.

202 Ibid., 79.

203 Ibid., 77.

204 Gilles Quispel, in discussion of his paper, "Valentinian Gnosis and the Apocryphon of John," Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 1, 128.

As we look more and more at the meager material we have from the Gnostics and their contemporaries, from Nag Hammadi and other places, we slowly put together more of the giant jig-saw puzzle.

In fact, Wayne Meeks, in the concluding discussion of Valentinianism at Yale, said that now we must reread the church fathers, for Nag Hammadi has shown us better the environment in which they wrote.<sup>205</sup>

Point 2, from early in this chapter, that no clear-cut lines existed as to what was Proto-and/or-Pre-Gnosticism and what was full-blown "classical" Gnosticism, seems to be underlined by our most abundant material, the Apocryphon of John. With Sethian elements and Valentinian elements, with the issue of how much Sethianism Valentinus absorbed, and as to how all of these factors might have emerged from Egyptian Gnosticism via Jewish Christian theology, we must find that the codices at Nag Hammadi did not provide answers so much as the openings onto new possibilities.

It might be possible that the Apocryphon of John developed much like Ford said the Book of Revelation was developed (whether or not Revelation actually was)--that is, by Jewish Christian or Jewish Apocalyptic material being built upon. The many versions of the Apocryphon might reveal something of that process. Could it be of the same genre? Were other Gnostic books developed similarly?

What is Gnosticism? Geddes MacGregor points out that gnosis, a Greek word, simply means "knowledge." All religions, in fact, are concerned with this gnosis knowledge as they are all concerned in

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<sup>205</sup> Wayne Meeks, "Concluding Discussion," Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 1, 352.

some way with some direct mystical knowledge of divine being. Christianity, says MacGregor, was "cradled in a half-hellenized Judaism and nurtured in the cosmopolitan mediterranean world" and "in turn cradled both modern science and special forms of humanism." Further, "in the widest sense of the terms, theosophy and the ancient gnosis are the same."<sup>206</sup>

Kurt Rudolph wrote that a "clear-cut definition" of gnosis is not easy. It is a dualistic religion, which spread out and existed in mediaeval Europe in the 14th century. A remnant remains in the Mandeans of Iran and Ira today.<sup>207</sup>

PHEME Perkins in The Gnostic Dialogue wrote that the Gnostics seemed to be made up of a growing middle class that "sought an authority equivalent to educated discourse without having made the conversion to analytic thought."<sup>208</sup> An esoteric pseudo-science derived from medicine as well as astrology, during the second century, emerged without fixed dogma, and with "diverse ritual practices, and without set form of leadership" with cults that "differed from place to place."<sup>209</sup>

The Gnostics appeared first to history as a group that could be identified in some fashion in the second century when they were attacked by the Christian heresiologists. Though before the Nag

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<sup>206</sup> Geddes MacGregor, Gnosis (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Pub., 1979), x.

<sup>207</sup> Rudolph, 1-2.

<sup>208</sup> PHEME Perkins, The Gnostic Dialogue (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 10.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 10, 15.

Hammadi codices were found, only a few writings from the Gnostics were known, even those earlier sources showed it was clear that the Gnostics themselves considered themselves to be part of the larger Christian community at the higher and more spiritual levels.<sup>210</sup> Thus, the Gnostics claimed to have the deeper wisdom, hermetism, Platonic mysticism, and ascetic withdrawal of Christianity. Outsiders might have simply seen them as hermetists or monks or Platonists.<sup>211</sup>

"Thus," says Perkins, "when we use the term 'Gnosticism,' we should remember that it was not a neatly defined sociological entity. Rather, gnosis seems to flourish as a religious or intellectual movement which claims to give the deeper significance of a tradition held by members of a larger group to which the Gnostics also belong." They were able, in fact, says Perkins, to develop "modes of interpretation" to enable them retain this manner of identity. Eventually their attempts to enlist others provided "sufficient attention and/or persecution to force them out of that larger group."<sup>212</sup>

One aspect is somewhat puzzling--the overall antipathy to the Jewish Creator God. Perkins cites George MacRae who has the suggestion that "Gnosticism arose as a revolutionary movement within Hellenized Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic circles," which would have an affinity with Christian Faith, since Christianity also "arose as a set of Jewish heresies." But Perkins believes MacRae's view

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

is wrong, since Christians were a part of Jewish faith for so long. Perkins suggests that perhaps at the end of the first century, when much "tightening up" was occurring, at a time when Christians had ceased to be within Jewish faith, and when Judaism itself was undergoing change, Christianity may have attracted Jews that brought a reaction and an interpretation of scriptures that in turn the Christians found unacceptable. "When Christians refused to accept the Gnostic readings of the Old Testament, a whole new area of controversy arose." But Perkins points out it is difficult to tell what actually occurred because the Gnostics never took the step that Christians and Jews took--that of canonizing their scriptures.<sup>213</sup>

James M. Robinson, in relating how the Nag Hammadi library pointed to a definition of Gnosticism, wrote in Biblical Archeologist in 1979:

The library as a whole lacks a clear mythological or doctrinal unity--even the individual Gnostic texts do not fit nicely into the standard sub-divisions of Gnosticism or, at times, into a proper definition of what we have understood as Gnosticism. . . . In any case, Gnosticism now seems to have been less a clear-cut religion or heresy with clearly distinguishable subjects than a trend, a directionality, a mood of the times, a practice, that came to expression within various religious traditions and in various mythological and quasi-philosophical formulations.<sup>214</sup>

In trying to untangle a definition for Gnosticism, one finds that related to Gnosticism are such systems as Orphism, Platonism, Middle Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Pythagoreanism, Neo-Pythagoreanism,

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>214</sup> James M. Robinson, "Introduction," Biblical Archeologist (Fall 1979): 204.



the writings of Philo, as well as Zoroasterianism, and Hinduism.

Henry Chadwick observed at the Yale Conference that if one were a second century individual trying to make sense of all the diverse cults and religions, one might end up as a gnostic, especially if one were inclined toward Platonism.<sup>215</sup>

Jacques Lacarriere, in The Gnostics, wrote that Gnosticism was a mutant thought drawn from the philosophies of the time. What Jewish and Christian religion saw as original sin, the Gnostics saw as the fault of the Creator God, the Demiurge who had sadistically dreamed up the world to which we are the exploited proletariat, the "dregs and sediment of a lost heaven, strangers on our own planet."<sup>216</sup>

Edwin Yamauchi says that the issue of Gnosticism is one of the most important today facing New Testament scholarship, especially that of defining Gnosticism. However, one person's Gnosticism is another's Mysticism, Esoterism, Docetism, or Encratism. Those who want a narrow definition do not see any pre-Christian Gnosticism, whereas those who are inclined to accept a broad definition can see Gnosticism in the New Testament as well as many other texts.<sup>217</sup>

Morton Smith, at Yale, in tracing the rise of the term Gnos-tikos, found it had been coined by Plato and more fully defined by the Platonic-Pythagorean philosophic traditions. It was not a Stoic

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<sup>215</sup> Henry Chadwick, "The Domestication of Gnosis," Rediscovery of Gnosticism, 13-14.

<sup>216</sup> Jacques Lacarriere, The Gnostics (New York: Dutton, 1977), 10-29.

<sup>217</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 13-14.

term, nor a term in Judaism, the Septuagint, the Greek pseudepigrapha or the Corpus Papyrorum Indiacarum. Philo's usage of the term was probably Platonic. The term Gnostikos was rarely used in Greek literature. Nor is it in the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers, or the second century Apologists. The first usage seems to have been by Celsus who saw that among the Christians there were some who called themselves Gnostics. Clement of Alexandria claimed to be a Gnostic and branded some groups of falsely claiming to be gnostics. Actually the modern use of the term gnostic is an eighteenth century one from scholars who got it from Irenaeus. However, Irenaeus referred to the "so-called" gnostics. Morton Smith thinks that Irenaeus referred to a few "outstandingly unpopular" heretics and thus branded them all in that vein. Later usage by Christians of Irenaeus' work led to all thinking of the gnostics to be shaped by his polemic, especially in Rome. Perhaps the members of the Platonic-Pythagorean schools called themselves gnostics. Smith feels that the "working hypothesis" of Messina does not work because the characteristics that were attempted to be set down were not coherent--there were elements missing and there were contradictions. Further, none of the Messina speakers, as they had tried to define Gnosticism, had asked as to what groups might have called themselves "gnostics" or were called that by their contemporaries.<sup>218</sup>

Morton Smith's comments bring us back to the Messina Definition.

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<sup>218</sup> Morton Smith, "History of the Term Gnostikos" Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 2, 796-807.

There are contradictions, omissions, and biases that are products of our own time.

As we look at our own time, we are aware of groups and denominations. Yet, what do we know about them, including the denominations of which we ourselves are members? How well do all United Methodists know the doctrines and history of Methodism? What do we know about Jehovah's Witnesses except that they do not salute the flag? What do we know about Christian Scientists except that they do not go to doctors? Or of Quakers who sit silently instead of having a usual form of worship service? Or about Mormons except they have more than one wife, even though this is no longer so? Could it not be the same for early times with various groups not knowing what other groups were about? And this includes the groups the church fathers belonged to.

How then to define Gnosticism?

In the sense that Gnosticism must be described overtly, it had to have had included within its rubric that young emerging Christian faith, with Christian faith itself a group of groups. Paul spoke of the threat of those who preached another gospel and another Jesus. Even in the New Testament it is evident that a number of Christian groups were in struggle not only with the world and Satan, but with each other. And as Jewish Christian theology and Jewish Gentile theology moved apart like ice floes moving away from each other, differences became more and more pronounced. It begins to look as if Sethian Gnosticism developed out of Jewish Gnosticism to become some form of Jewish Christianity to impact Valentinus. And when Valentinus carried it to Rome, where non-Jewish Christianity

had developed out of Paul's and others' missionary efforts to the Gentiles, that the result was a credibility gap of the highest order.

Western Christianity has always been blind to the ways that Roman paganism affected it. It has been said that present day Christianity is actually ancient Roman paganism with Jesus Christ pasted on to it, a thought to give us pause, especially when we consider that Mithras the Sun-God, whose day, Sunday, we give special worship to Jesus, or whose birthday, the winter solstice, we came to see as the Christ Mass, Christmas, the birthday of Jesus, and who was also born of a virgin in a cave/stable, and whom wise men came from afar to worship--whose traditions borrowed from whom?

How to define Gnosticism?

Members of the Messina Conference felt that to define Gnosticism was impossible.

Th. P. Van Baaren at Messina said it was not solved "where exactly gnosticism begins and ends," and he related he personally was convinced that "all attempts to define gnosticism as a phenomenological complex must be doomed to failure; the only way of coming to a satisfactory definition is that of considering gnosticism as a historic complex belonging to a certain age and a certain place and forming part of a certain culture. This, of course, does not exclude foreign influences nor later modifications after the main stream had died out."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Th. P. Van Baaren, "Towards a Definition of Gnosticism" in Bianchi, Le Origini Dello Gnosticismo, 174.

Menahem Mansoor at Messina said that to attempt to define Gnosticism is "tantamount to attempting the impossible."<sup>220</sup>

R. McL. Wilson at Messina said:

On the traditional definition, which prevailed for centuries, Gnosticism is a Christian heresy of the second century, the result of the impact of Christianity upon the Gentile world and of the consequent efforts, on one side or the other, to assimilate Christian teaching to the ideas and the thinking of the contemporary environment. This definition has the advantage of providing a limited and well-defined field of research, a group of systems which, for all the variety between the views of one group and those of another, yet present common factors enough to justify our considering them as different aspects of a single phenomenon. All are Christian, or at least considered themselves to be Christian, although they diverge in greater or less degree from what was to become the orthodox tradition of the Church. <sup>221</sup>

But, says Wilson, this traditional definition does not hold up well. When the origins of the Gnostic movement are probed into, it is found that second century Gnosticism was not an aberration within Christianity so much as it was an amalgamation of Christian ideas along with those drawn from outside sources. Further, the early Church did not exist in a vacuum. It existed in the ever changing world of the Roman-Greek-Jewish-Egyptian Mediterranean world. And we come to discover in the New Testament as well as the writings of Philo, those ideas that relate to Gnosticism. Thus, the Gnostic movement was wider than Christianity. Further, what were to become orthodox and heretical existed side by side, developing, for some

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<sup>220</sup> Menahem Mansoor, "The Nature of Gnosticism in Qumran" in Bianchi, Le Origini, 389.

<sup>221</sup> R. McL Wilson, "Gnosis, Gnosticism and the New Testament," Le Origini, 511.

time, yet influencing one another.<sup>222</sup>

At the Yale Conference, R. J. ZwiWerblowsky, of Hebrew University, Jerusalem, reported:

Perhaps an outsider's summing up will be helpful. . . First, it is difficult to know whether we are dealing with a self-designation or an imposed designation. We do know that the church fathers' obsession to catalog led to an impossibly large list of Gnostic sects. In deciding we must remember that the moment of self-designation by a group also starts the process of deciding who is outside the group. Second, the heresiologists named groups either after founders or teachers or according to a main feature. Third, it is important to distinguish between tightly structured groups and those composed of free-floating individuals--an analogy is provided by comparison of the early Freudian school and later Freudians, and even the universal employment of technical terms generated by the early Freudians. Finally, I wish to suggest the possibility of binary opposition in understanding spiritual lineage. I cannot think of the Sethites without thinking of those who called themselves "Cainites." Assuming a derivation from Adam, you must derive yourself from one son or the other. So there is a polemical edge to the term "Sethites." Even without an organized school or sect there would be a tendency to claim a spiritual lineage from Seth.<sup>223</sup>

An exact definition of Gnosticism is not possible.

We have come a meandering way in these pages to look at the writings of the church fathers, the "Gnostic" writings, the various interpretations of scholars, to arrive at some givens and some not-givens.

It seems likely that sometime in the period between the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and the beginning of the second century the emerging groups in the chaos of that post-war time polarized. The groups that were to become modern Judaism emerged. Likewise, the

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 512-525.

<sup>223</sup> R. J. ZwiWerblowsky, in discussion of "Die 'Sethianische' Gnosis--Eine Haresiologische Fiktion?" by Kurt Rudolph in Rediscovery of Gnosticism, vol. 2, Bentley Layton, ed., 586.

groups that were to be called Christianity and Gnosticism emerged. We might imagine what state there would be if California were hit by the expected earth quake with the resulting chaos. What pockets of church life and scriptures and religious writings would be found would be the new basis of any emerging religious spirit. We know that the Christian base in Jerusalem was destroyed. We know that the Jewish temple worship in Jerusalem was destroyed. We know that the Tenth Legion under Vespasian and Titus went through the place like a huge lawnmower. We know that Qumran was destroyed. We know Masada was destroyed. We know the various Jewish groups were fighting among themselves. The main cause of Titus' destruction of Jerusalem was the fact that the various opposing groups within Jerusalem destroyed the food that would have been their salvation and would have allowed them to hold out against Titus. We know some of this if we can believe Josephus.

In the chaos after the fall of Jerusalem, the way was open for all off-shoot groups to emerge and claim whatever it was they felt provoked to proclaim. We cannot know how much the fall of Jerusalem provided the catalyst for the emergence of Christianity as a world religion and for the emergence of the groups that would be called Gnostic.

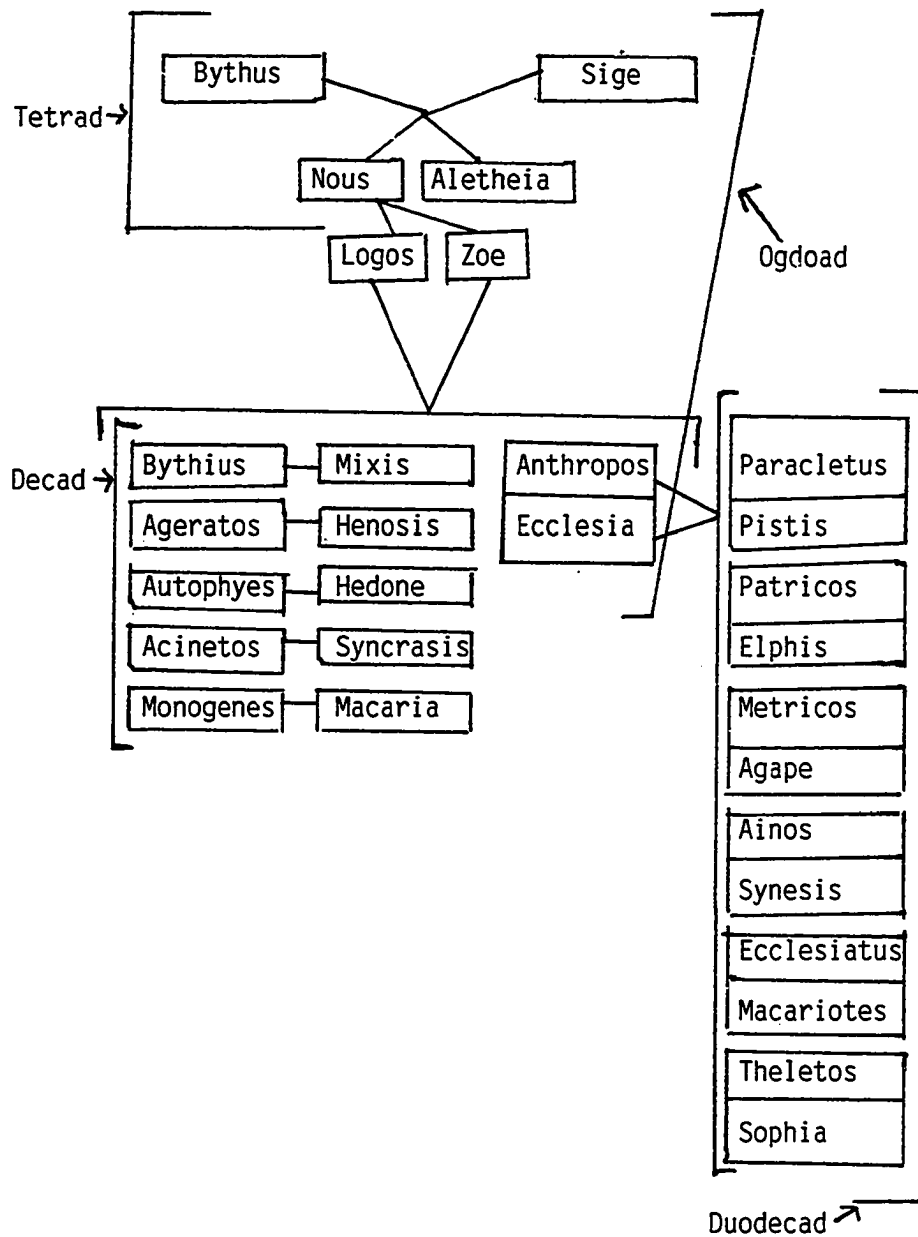
Gnosticism as a trend had to be that trend that was more Jewish. What became orthodox Christianity had to be that trend that was more Roman. For one thing, the anti-gnostic writings were from the Roman fathers. Gnosticism seemed to revolt against and yet at the same time make use of Jewish influences, such as Genesis. Orthodox Christianity moved in the Roman arena, being influenced by Roman thought.

As the Messina members proclaimed, no simple definition of Gnosticism is possible, even of the so-called "classical" Gnosticism of the second century.

Gnosticism, it is my belief, came out of the trend that existed out of groups that did not have the Exile in their tradition, among them, the Samaritan community. The woman in John 4 was of a community that saw Jacob as an ancestor as did the Jews of Judah. This matches the traditions that say the gnostics came out of Samaria. These people had similar sacred traditions to the Jews. And after the destruction of Jerusalem, the outlying areas would be the locales for the emerging Christianity to take root, including Samaria. Out of these groups in the outlying areas after 70 C.E. came possibly the development that polarized eventually into Gnosticism and orthodox Christianity. I believe Christianity in its "orthodox" form was an offshoot of these groups, and since it may have been an offshoot of the gnosticism that developed, Christianity was in fact a Gnostic heresy.

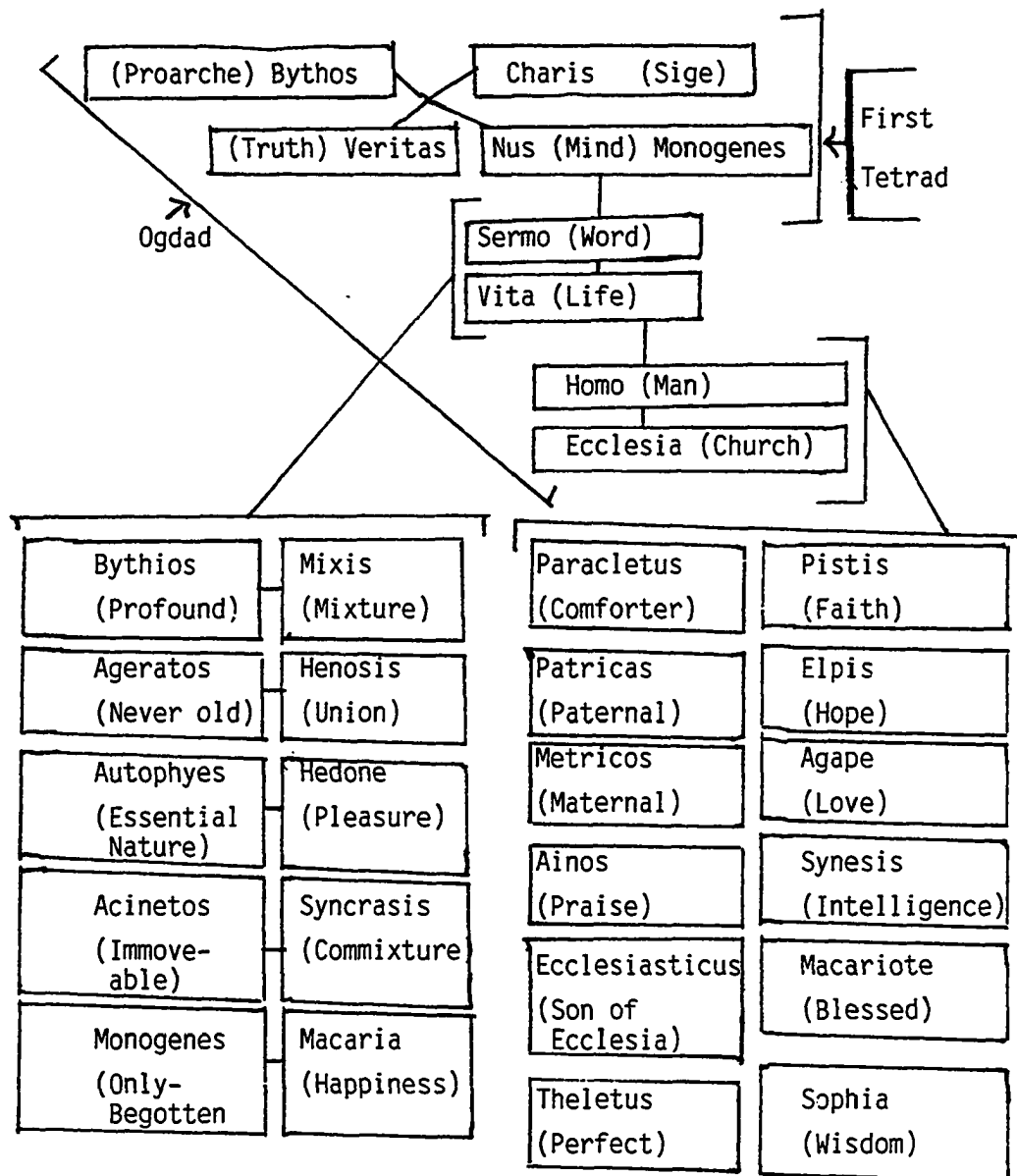


PLATE I  
THE PLEROMA AS DESCRIBED BY IRENAEUS



## PLATE II

## THE PLEROMA AS DESCRIBED BY TERTULLIAN



### CHAPTER 3

### ECUMENISM

Ecumenism is no less easy to define than Gnosticism. To do so, one has to sort out the various subgroups: The Ecumenical Movement, The Ecumenical Councils, The Eastern Christian Traditions, The World Council of Churches, The National Council of Churches, The International Missionary Movement, The Faith and Order Conferences, and others.

And we have to let go of the traditional picture of the unity and bliss of the early church to realize that the quest for ecumenism began in Jesus' very camp. For the disciples as portrayed show no inclination of understanding what Jesus was about as they jockeyed for places within some supposed power structure to come. Later, Paul's conflicts with Jerusalem, with Peter, with just about everybody in fact, do not infuse us with any sense of the often supposed apostolic unity of the early church.

What is going on now, the "scandal" of separation, has been going on all along.

"Ecumenism" comes from the Greek word for house, oikos, from which have come also our words "economy," and "ecology." So, to talk of ecumenism is to talk of "house." The logo for the World Council of Churches is a ship plowing through rough seas with "Oecumene" written underneath.

An enormous amount of discussion has been aired at church councils

and meetings during the past two thousand years. (Do I really want to advocate more discussion as I did in the preface?) The Roman Catholic Church recognized twenty-one Ecumenical Councils--the last being Vatican II. This does not count the other church councils of Roman Catholicism or the various Protestant councils. This does not count the Faith and Order Conferences or all the meetings of the World Council of Churches. Nor does it count the early church councils prior to the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. The Eastern Orthodox and the Coptic Churches have had their councils. Other groups and sects have had their councils and conferences. We Christians have done an enormous amount of talking, and we have to ask what we have to show for it.

As Bishop James Pike pointed out in If This Be Heresy, there have always been councils and synods, each with its own agenda and which regarded its pronouncements and authority as final.<sup>1</sup>

Nor have these councils and conferences been on totally spiritually causes. Interspersed with all that occurred have been the political power plays, the briberies, the by-products of violence and conceit, the intercourse with solely mundane considerations, and the effect of insanity itself. There was, for instance, the case of Formosus, whose body was disinterred from his tomb after his death in 896 C.E., dressed in his papal robes and set on his throne; a council subjected him to a post-humous trial. His papal election was declared invalid, his papal acts, nullified, and his

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Pike, If This Be Heresy (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 53.

body was then thrown into the Tiber River. Much later, the judgment of this "trial" was itself nullified.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, what we have is noteworthy. The Church, however one may wish to define the Church, is unique in having such an amount of continuous recorded history as does exist.<sup>3</sup> We have a kind of continuous diary or journal of our two thousand year existence, thanks to all the church councils.

That which makes an Ecumenical Council, and thus distinguishes it from other kinds of councils, regional, provincial, etc., is that The Ecumenical, or General, Council is for the whole church, the whole world.<sup>4</sup> The first council so recognized as Ecumenical was the one called by Constantine at his summer residence in Nicaea in 325 C.E.<sup>5</sup>

But prior to that time were other councils. For instance, about 190 C.E. a great controversy concerned the date of Easter and caused the formation of a council of bishops. Before that, it was the custom for bishops to meet together at the funeral of a fellow bishop and elect his successor. This custom perhaps goes back as far as 100 C.E.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, it would seem that funerals of bishops are what lie

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<sup>2</sup>Philip Hughes, The Church in Crisis (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), 147. Also, "Formosus," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed.

<sup>3</sup>Hughes, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 3.

in back of the spawning of all the church councils that have come forth.

However, it was the council the Apostles and elders mentioned in the Book of Acts (15:6-29) that is considered to be the prototype of all councils and assemblies of bishops. The freedom of Gentile Christians from the requirements of the Mosaic Law with the stipulation to refrain from food sacrificed to idols, from meat of strangled animals, and from fornication, was the issue of that Council of Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

One definition of an Ecumenical Council is that it is "a purely human arrangement whereby a divinely founded institution functions in a particular way for a particular purpose."<sup>8</sup> And each council has had its own individual history, cause, and even personality--indeed, taken together, the Ecumenical Councils did not comprise any unity in any sense of the word, despite any attempt to put them under one rubric.<sup>9</sup>

There were two main groupings of the Ecumenical Councils. The first eight were held in the east--either Asia Minor or Eastern Europe. Their official speech was Greek. All the rest were in the west: Italy, France, or Germany. Their official speech was Latin.<sup>10</sup> The official speech of Vatican II was likewise Latin,

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<sup>7</sup> Hubert Jedin, Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church (New York: Herder & Herder, 1960), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

with provisions for translations and news releases.<sup>11</sup>

The First Ecumenical Council was called in 325 C.E. following disturbances caused by what was considered a new teaching by Arius of Alexandria that Christ was a pure creature, made of nothing, the Son of God by adoption, called God in scripture, but not really God.<sup>12</sup> The problem raised by Arius' position was that if Christ is not God, what then was the nature of the salvation brought by the death of Jesus on the cross and what could sinners hope for after their own deaths. This was the idea that shook the empire.<sup>13</sup>

The council adopted a creed dealing with Arius which said in part: "We believe. . . in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of the Father, the sole-begotten; this is to say, of the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, born, not made, consubstantial with the Father (In the Greek original homo-ousion toi patri) through whom all things were made. . ."<sup>14</sup>

They threw Arius and his supporters out, went on to other things such as the official setting of Easter, ended with a great banquet given by their gracious host, Constantine, and thought that everything had been settled. Athanasius, one of the opponents of Arius, wrote: "The word of the Lord, put forth by the oecumenical council at Nicaea is an eternal word, enduring for ever." But the real

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<sup>11</sup> Claud D. Nelson, The Vatican Council and All Christians (New York: Association Press, 1962), 47.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21.

troubles were yet to come.<sup>15</sup>

In 381, the Second Ecumenical Council, called the First General Council of Constantinople, was held. For, even though Constantine had banished Arius, he later called Arius back and with the advisement of a church council in Tyre, reinstated Arianism which flourished all the more after the death of Constantine, in 337, under the joint emperorship of his three sons.<sup>16</sup> Thus, even though thrown out at Nicaea, Arianism was the "orthodoxy" of Christian Faith during most of the fourth century.

There were a number of problems which led to the necessity of the Council of 381. One was the translation of the word homo-ousion. The word had been used because it was non-scriptural and thus incompatible with any manner of Arian theory--thus it was used in the attempt to prevent any further Arian infiltration into the church.<sup>17</sup> But it was also so non-scriptural and incompatible in its own right that it failed to be understood by even those who sought to use it. For the term homo-ousion in Greek was seen to mean that the Father and Son are one person whereas the Latin understood it to mean that they are of the same nature.<sup>18</sup>

It might be possible that what Harnack believed, that if Arianism would have been victorious, Christian faith would have been ruined, without religious content, and nothing more than a system of cos-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 21-24, and 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 27-28.



mology and ethics.<sup>19</sup> In any case, the council of 381 put together a reinstatement of the homo-ousion, the consubstantiality of the Divine Logos with the Father, the distinctness of the three persons of the Trinity and of the Incarnation of The Second Person. Another item that was discussed was that the bishop of Constantinople should have the primacy of honor next in line to the bishop of Rome, for Constantinople was New Rome.<sup>20</sup> We did not need the problems that pronouncement caused.

The Third Ecumenical Council, the General Council of Ephesus, was called in 431, partly because of the rivalry that had begun between Constantinople and Alexandria. The chair of the bishop of Constantinople became vacant. (And recall this chair was seen in primacy behind the chair of Rome.) The bishop of Alexandria, Theophiles, had someone in mind that he wanted to be elected. But John Chrysostom, a monk from Antioch, was elected instead. In time, John was banished. And the rivalry went on under the successors of those two--Theophiles' own nephew, Cyril of Alexandria, and a new bishop of Constantinople, Nestorius.<sup>21</sup>

Nestorius sincerely felt he was fighting heresy by condemning those who used the term Theotókos (bearer of God) for Mary instead of Chrisotókos (bearer of Christ). For Nestorius complained that there were those who were confused when they spoke of Christ as God and man as though what is human in Christ is divine. Nestorius

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 30-32.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 33-36.

felt that such concepts were Arian and Apollarian in their nature and were therefore heresy. And Cyril of Alexandria was on the opposing side.<sup>22</sup>

It would seem that in two thousand years we have not settled what we want to say we believe about Jesus Christ.

At the Council of Ephesus, Nestorius was condemned, his teachings about the nature of Christ, condemned, and he was banished from the episcopate.<sup>23</sup> One has to ask how much of the quarrel was really the quarrel between Cyril and Nestorius in the issue of Theotókos verses Chrisotókos, and how much was between the power plays of Alexandria and Constantinople

Yet at Ephesus, the orthodoxy of Cyril was questioned also. He was accused of Arianism and Apollinarianism by the Antiocheans, as Nestorius had charged. Indeed, just about everyone eventually was condemned at Ephesus--Nestorius, Cyril, Memnon the Bishop of Ephesus, even John Chrysostom of Antioch who at one time presided over the council against Cyril and Memnon, among others. The rather disorganized state of affairs had to be taken in hand by the Emperor who called his own conference at Chalcedon, cooled everybody down and sent them all home. The great Council of Ephesus was over. But there was more to come.<sup>24</sup>

The crack that could be seen in the church at the Ephesus

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<sup>22</sup> Hughes, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 46-48.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 48-52.

Council widened further. The Ephesus Council was a victory for Alexandria against Antioch and, perhaps more especially, Constantinople.<sup>25</sup> Pope Gregory the Great compared the first four Ecumenical Councils to the superstructure of the Four Gospels, for they in turn formulated the basic dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation.<sup>26</sup> Yet, another view might be that in the Fourth Ecumenical Council the Church seriously floundered, came apart in a way not yet remedied--at Chalcedon.

For the controversy lay unsettled between John of Antioch, Cyril of Alexandria, and even Nestorius, deposed bishop of Constantinople--all of whom felt the others to be heretics. A certain tension was held in balance, however, until the major figures of the Ephesus Council died and new characters inherited the roles. In 448, a new crisis over the meaning of the Incarnation of Christ developed. The protagonists now were: a monk of Constantinople, Eutyches, who actually claimed to be a follower of Cyril; his bishop, Flavian of Constantinople; and the bishop of Alexandria who had been a deacon under Cyril, Dioscoros.<sup>27</sup>

This new crisis was that of Monophysitism. This doctrine brought by the disciples of Cyril was that: "There is only one physis since the Incarnation, of God the Word." Physis, a word

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<sup>25</sup> Francis Dvornik, The Ecumenical Councils (New York: Hawthorn, 1963), 25.

<sup>26</sup> Jedin, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Hughes, 53-55.

like homo-ousion, was the cause of the problem. For Greek and Latin saw the word differently. For Greeks, physis referred to nature; for Latins, physis meant person.<sup>28</sup>

As Francis Dvornik points out, this doctrine of Monophysitism appealed to Alexandrian theologians because of Plato's concept that man through his own efforts can approach deification. This concept, also, was taught by the Alexandrian philosopher Plotinus, who founded Neo-Platonism. "The incarnate Word is therefore the source of true life, and the man who is in Christ will be re-elevated into and comingled with the Divine." Thus the absorption of human nature by "the divine" was appealing.<sup>29</sup>

This idea is also Gnostic in character as well as similar to the Christian Science attitude of today.

For a time, Monophysitism held sway. But opposition grew, especially from Antioch. Then Eutyches was declared a heretic in Constantinople by a council of bishops and later deposed by a synod. But Eutyches appealed to Rome. Dioscoros, who was against the deposition of Eutyches, called his own synod and reversed the deposition. The Pope in Rome asked for a report from Flavian. Agreeing with the deposition of Eutyches, the Pope, Leo I, sent back a tome in which was his own judgment of faith. In the meantime, the Emperor, Theodosius II, had called a council at Ephesus which would go down in history as The Robbers' Council, The Latrocinium (from

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Dvornik, 25.

a statement by the Pope, "In illo Ephesino non iudicium sed latrocinium"--the Ephesus council was "not a council at all, but a 'get together' of bandits.>"). Even though some one hundred and fourteen bishops agreed that the statement by Eutyches was sound doctrine, an uproar occurred, possibly caused by Dioscoros. The doors of the church they were meeting in were opened to allow a mob to pour in. Flavian was dragged away, in spite of the fact he sought sanctuary by hanging onto the pillars of the altar, and he was condemned. Going into exile, he died three days later while on the way--but he had been able to appeal to the Pope.<sup>30</sup>

By now, Dioscoros had arrayed a good part of the church against Rome. And this was the mood that led to the Council of Chalcedon, the Fourth General Ecumenical Council in 451.<sup>31</sup>

However, a new Emperor, Marcian, brought a new spirit of his own to the council. Flavian's body was brought back to Constantinople, for burial. Bishops exiled by the Latrocinium of 449 were recalled. The Pope called the Chalcedon Council. But just before it opened, Dioscoros tried to get the Pope excommunicated. As a result, Dioscoros was denied a seat among the bishops. Then he was condemned for his actions at the Latrocinium, (for which he offered defense) and in general the entire procedures at the Latrocinium were condemned. Dioscoros was banished.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hughes, 57-60.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 60-66.

Next on the agenda was Pope Leo's Tome.<sup>33</sup>

This Tome, which had been refused a hearing at the Latrocinium, and which rejected the Monophysitism of Eutyches, discussed a doctrine of two-natures for Christ. This doctrine had been anticipated by Tertullian.<sup>34</sup> And perhaps it had been anticipated by the early Gnostics, if Pagels is right about The Gospel of Truth and The Tripartite Tractate, as reported in the previous chapter.

The Egyptians in the gathering, however, would not sign it. Again, it took the Emperor to calm down the members of a council. Cries of "They are Nestorians!" and "Do you follow Leo, or Dioscoros?" and "Leo says what Cyril says" showed their mood. Finally, a formulation, based on Leo's Tome, and acknowledging the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople, was drawn up attesting to the two natures of Christ, united, inconvertible, and inseparable.<sup>35</sup>

This formulation reads in part: "We all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with us as regards his manhood, like us in all things, apart from sin; begotten of the Father before the ages as regards his Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born from the Virgin Mary, the God-bearer (theotokos), as regards his manhood; one and the same

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> David F. Wright, "Councils and Creeds," Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity, ed. Tim Dowley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 171-172.

<sup>35</sup> Hughes, 66-68.

Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, or without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and coming together to form one person (prosôpon) and one entity (hypostasis), not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons. . . ." <sup>36</sup>

Other matters discussed at Chalcedon were rules for monks, deaconesses and nuns, bishops coming to metropolitan status, and the rights of the Bishop of Rome. Not to be lost among the considerations was the concern of the rights of the Chair of Constantinople on which the council ended somewhat uncertainly. For the Bishop of Constantinople wanted the same rights and honors of the Bishop of Rome and had to settle for second place. <sup>37</sup>

The decrees of Chalcedon were now not only doctrinal but imperial law. They offended Eastern churches which had especially cherished the One-Nature of Christ doctrine of Cyril. Thus, Anti-Chalcedonianism pervaded in Egypt, especially among monks. Nestorianism itself moved to and pervaded in Persia. And the breach between Eastern and Western churches, between Greek and Latin, was in full play. <sup>38</sup>

For the Monophysites found the Tome of Pope Leo I too Nestorian in tone--they objected to that, thus continuing the rivalry

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<sup>36</sup> Wright, 175.

<sup>37</sup> Hughes, 72-75.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, 176-177.

between Cyril and Nestorius of a time past. This in turn would seem to indicate the real dispute ran deeper than mere words in a doctrine. A Syrian monk in attendance at Chalcedon reported back to Jerusalem that "Chalcedon has betrayed Cyril." Egypt, as expected, responded badly to news of the deposition of Dioscoros. Riots occurred, and in 457, Proterius, Bishop of Alexandria, was murdered and his corpse was dragged through the streets. A Monophysite bishop, Timothy, replaced him.<sup>39</sup>

Such was the mood of the times. The troubles stemming from those events are still with us. Dvornik writes:

In spite of many attempts at winning the heretics over to the Creed of Chalcedon, Monophysitism, organized in National Churches, continues to exist in our days in Egypt, Syria, Armenia, Mesopotamia and Abyssinia. A group of Egyptian Copts (60,000) united with Rome, but the great majority (over a million) still professes Monophysitism. The Orthodox Melchites, mostly Greeks in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, are still in majority schismatics (about 320,000); only about 150,000 of them accepted the union with Rome. The Syrian and Mesopotamian Monophysites are called Jacobites after Jacob, Bishop of Edessa, who did much for the organization of their church, in the second half of the sixth century.<sup>40</sup>

As a matter of fact, it was a Metropolitan of the Syrian Jacobite Church in Jerusalem, Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, who was the first religious official to see the Dead Sea Scrolls in Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hughes, 72-75.

<sup>40</sup> Dvornik, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Edmund Wilson, The Dead Sea Scrolls (New York: Oxford Univ., Press, 1969), 4-7.



The attempt was made to rectify the tension of the hundred years following Chalcedon. The Fifth Ecumenical Council, which was the Second General Council of Constantinople, met in 553.<sup>42</sup> As well as trying to woo the Monophysites, the Fifth Council also condemned Origen as a heretic as well as condemning what Nestorians had not been condemned at Chalcedon.<sup>43</sup> Needless to say, the effort to regain the Monophysites failed. They had the worse opinion of Chalcedon and of the Catholic Church--its councils had no more interest for them.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, the Sixth Ecumenical Council, The Third General Council of Constantinople, in 680-681, had to deal with Monophysitism all over again, this time in its form of Monotheletism, a heresy that Christ "did not possess a human will, or ever act with a force" that was human "but that, in him, all that in us comes from our wills came from his being God." This made Christ in no way human. But to add to the troubles, as if they were not enough, were the issues of the religion of Mohammed and the continuing tension between Rome and Constantinople. The tensions for the time were mended, and the confession of the nature of Christ at Chalcedon was reaffirmed.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, the Sixth Ecumenical Council had had as part of its

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<sup>42</sup> Hughes, 72-75.

<sup>43</sup> Wright, 178.

<sup>44</sup> Hughes, 72-75.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 102-122.

agenda that of reconciliation with the Monophysites because of the tensions with Mohammedism. But as David Wright pointed out:

Once again the resolving of doctrinal conflict was a major factor in the creating of ecclesiastical divisions, which in the eastern Mediterranean area weakened the Empire's defences against the Muslim invaders. Issues of faith and order had proved to be disastrously interwoven. The creeds and confessions of the ecumenical councils were bought at considerable cost to peace. <sup>46</sup>

The Seventh Ecumenical Council, The Second General Council of Nicaea, came about in 787. This was the council of the icons and Iconoclasts. The result was the reinstatement of the use of images to aid in worship. A great deal was going on at that time. Moslems were overrunning parts of the empire. Historians are unsure why the issue of images even erupted at this time. <sup>47</sup>

Emperor Leo III, in 730, had begun the icon issue by sending an edict that called for the removal of all icons from churches and public places. Possibly he did it out of a sense of guilt that was related to the punishment of Israel by God for idolatry after he had heard bishops preaching against icons. There was much rebellion as iconoclasts wanted to put symbols of the cross, the Bible, or the elements of the Lord's Supper in place of the icons. An angry mob had killed the official who came with a cross to replace an icon of Christ when Leo had first declared his opposition to icons. A monk, John of Damascus, was the one who set in motion the ideas that were to restore icons by appealing to Plato's phil-

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<sup>46</sup> Wright, 178.

<sup>47</sup> Hughes, 123-140.

osophy on "forms" and arguing that icons can be used to inform and aid in worship such as the Bible or other symbols such as the cross. The Seventh Ecumenical Council condemned the iconoclastic movement and backed John of Damascus. Eastern Orthodox Churches today celebrate the end of the iconoclasts on the first Sunday of Lent with the Feast of Orthodoxy and recognition of the ruling of the Seventh Council.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps it was the chaos of the time itself that brought the issue of icons into mind. In times of upheaval people tend to need objects of religious meaning such as rosaries and Bibles. Refugees have carried pictures or statues of their religious faith even if other objects have to be left behind. Bibles are carried into war. Apparently the exiles carried their religious scriptures into Babylon even at the expense of leaving other articles behind, else we would not have the scriptures of the Old Testament today.

The date, December 25, 800, is important as the date Charlemagne was made Emperor. That the Pope made him so was an important issue --it would effect church-state procedures. About the same the iconoclasm issue revived. Tension between east and west revived.<sup>49</sup>

The Eighth Ecumenical Council, The Fourth General Council of Constantinople of 869-870 was brought about by the circumstances involving Photius and the controversy of whether he or Ignatius were the rightful Patriarch of Constantinople. Repercussions throughout

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<sup>48</sup> Harlie Kay Gallatin, "The Eastern Church," Eerdmans' Handbook, 245-249.

<sup>49</sup> Hughes, 141-156.

the empire occurred, and bishop after bishop lost their chairs. Monasteries were divided. The new Pope Nicholas I decided not to recognize Photius. The disagreements were complicated by Bulgarian border wars as the "Dark Ages" were falling over Europe. Savage times were at hand. It was under Nicholas I that the aforementioned Formosus was a cardinal. The issue of the Filioque arose--a doctrine that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son rather than from the Father through the Son. Photius condemned Nicholas I and all the western bishops on the issue of the Filioque--which he saw as heresy. A council called by Photius in 867 excommunicated Nicholas I--news Nicholas I never received as he died before it reached him. The new Pope Adrian II, on orders from the Emperor, called the General Council after deposing Photius. The main event of the council was to put Photius on trial, and all of Photius' writings were burned. However, the procedures of the Eighth Council were reconsidered later with Photius presiding, which shows the confusions of the times.<sup>50</sup>

There was not another General Council until 1123, The First Lateran Council. It was a victory celebration, in many ways, to proclaim that the church had survived the Dark Ages of bad popes, ruthless tyrants, disorganization, rioting, burning, and war.<sup>51</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes the Eighth Ecumenical Council of 869-870. The Eastern Orthodox Churches do not. The council that reinstated Photius is seen by the Eastern Churches as the Eighth Council. From then on, the Church was broken. On

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 171.

July 16, 1054, the break was final when a bull of excommunication was laid on the altar at St. Sophia in Constantinople by three papal legates. The bull began, "Let God witness and judge."<sup>52</sup>

It was after the sixth century that the differences between East and West in Christian faith became observable and crucial. The differences did not relate to basic doctrine. Rather, the differences centered on more subtle matters--the customary expressions of faith, the manner of worship itself, and administration. These matters seemed to change as the central faith moved from the Jewish environment to the regions of the Roman Empire. Although the word, "catholic," meaning "general" or "universal" referred to the whole body of Christian faith during the second century, many differences produced by language and culture began to color the faith, thus producing in turn, tensions.<sup>53</sup>

When the Sixth Ecumenical Council had condemned the Monophysites, this had brought to official position that which Roman bishops had been fighting for and had left the churches of the East in a counter position.<sup>54</sup>

While the East and West had been drifting apart for centuries, and the different ways of worship and ritual had been notable, the lack of contact had been a strong factor. But a major factor was the Western wish for the Bishop of Rome to be the head of the Church. The Eastern idea of church government emphasized a council of the

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<sup>52</sup> Jedin, 58-59.

<sup>53</sup> Gallatin, Eerdmans' Handbook, 237.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 244.

five patriarchs--namely, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome--whereas the West believed the Pope in Rome should be the head.<sup>55</sup> This issue is still not resolved.

Perhaps the next councils would be best seen as reform councils. There had been papal councils between 870 and 1123. Then came The Ninth Ecumenical Council, The First General Lateran Council mentioned above, held in the Pope's cathedral church. A group of reform canons came forth. Then came the Second Lateran Council in 1139 which, while it was occasioned by a domestic dispute involving Anacletus II, carried more reform canons relating to celibacy, marriage, and priesthood, among others. The Third Lateran Council, The Eleventh General Council, came in 1179 and dealt with requirements for the episcopacy, property, and lay preaching after it resolved the issue of a schism caused by Emperor Barbarossa. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, number Twelve of the General Councils, dealt with "transubstantiation," requirements for penance and the eucharist once a year, and other general rules.<sup>56</sup>

Then came the Lyons Councils. The First Council of Lyons was held in 1245 and dealt mainly with the dispute that Pope Innocent IV had with Emperor Frederick II, whom he charged with heresy, alliance with infidels, and perjury. The Second Council of Lyons, Fourteenth of the General Councils, in 1274, dealt with the crusades and reunion

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<sup>55</sup> Robert G. Clouse, "Flowering: The Western Church," Eerdmans' Handbook, 267-268.

<sup>56</sup> Jedin, 60-82.

with the Greek Orthodox. Thomas Aquinas was to attend, but he died while on his way. Greek envoys attended, union was achieved, and mass was celebrated. But the union did not last. Fifteenth of the General Councils at Vienne in 1311 dealt with the Order of the Templars, more matters of the crusades, more reforms, among them concerns of the Franciscan Order.<sup>57</sup>

The "Great Schism of the West" occasioned the next council--of Constance, 1414-1418. Preceding Constance was the Council of Pisa in 1409. Two Popes were on hand where only one was supposed to be --Gregory XII and Benedict XIII. To make matters worse, a third Pope, John XXIII, was elected to replace the first two. But neither Gregory nor Benedict would give ground. John XXIII saw the Council of Constance as a continuation of the Pisa Council and was certain it would confirm his office. What the Constance Council did was to depose all three and elect yet a fourth man to Pope, Martin V. (Which explains why we could have "another" John XXIII in the twentieth century.) The Council of Constance also dealt with John Hus, a professor in Prague, whose criticism of the clergy especially, occasioned his arrest, his condemnation for heresy, and his execution.<sup>58</sup>

The Seventeenth Ecumenical Council, called the General Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence lasted from 1431-1442. It met in those various locations and had as an outstanding accomplishment the union with Eastern Orthodox communions. But the union did not last.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 82-108.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 108-126.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 127-134.

The Fifth Lateran Council, Eighteenth of the General Councils, was 1512-1517. It dealt with issues still active from the Pisa Council and more reforms.<sup>60</sup>

Then came October 31, of the year the Fifth Lateran Council closed, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses, it is said, on the door of the court-church, Wittenberg.<sup>61</sup>

Ecumenical Council Nineteen, The Council of Trent, was the result. It began in 1542 and lasted until 1564. Luther had stirred up the proverbial hornet's nest. And the Council of Trent discussed the subjects that Luther's statements had provoked. The Council attempted to be the "answer of the teaching authority in the Church to the Protestant reformation. It was likewise the fulfillment of the ever rising demand for an internal renewal of the church."<sup>62</sup>

Three hundred years passed before the next General Council, The Twentieth, Vatican I, took up where the Council of Trent left off. Again, doctrine of the church was the main issue. Much had happened to the world--including the events of the Reformation and then the French Revolution. The concept of "liberty" was one not only for the secular, but for the church as well. And it was one that Pius IX, the Pope of Vatican I, was in conflict with. The Council opened December 8, 1869 with an ecumenical character that was more in evidence than at any other council so far. The primacy and infallibility of the Pope were the main items dealt with--not a bad

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 138-141.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 152-186.



agenda in view of all the experiences that Popes had had. (Such as the first John XXIII) The Council had to be adjourned because of the Franco-German War when troops occupied the streets of Rome. It was never formally closed.<sup>63</sup>

During the Chair of Unity Octave in 1959, the inspiration came to Pope John XXIII to call the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council. It was to deal principally with unity. As Claud D. Nelson pointed out, the breach between Roman Catholics and other Christians was very deep. East and West had been separated since 1054 C.E. The separation between Protestants and Roman Catholics had begun in the sixteenth century and had been broadened by the Vatican I Council of 1869-70. Vatican II was to be a council of "aggiornamento," a bringing the church up to date so that the "separated brethren" could "return to the Roman Catholic Church, their true home." (oikos) The language of "return," however, brought the issue of how much "returning" or whether all of it, indeed, had to be done by the "separated brethren"--The Protestants, Anglicans, Eastern Orthodox. The issues of Mariology, the Bible, Science, Atheism, and World Peace were hard at hand, as well as issues of church-state, the Lay Apostolate, Race Relations, Religious Liberty, tensions in Latin America, Anti-Semitism, Population, and Food.<sup>64</sup> And, there were the issues of birth control and the "pill."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Jedin, 186-223.

<sup>64</sup> Nelson, 13-36.

<sup>65</sup> Christopher Hollis, The Achievements of Vatican II (New York: Hawthorn, 1967), 93-97.

From the point of view of the Vatican II Council, it was unique among the others:

The first Vatican Council, the Council of Trent, and the medieval councils were General Councils in theory, but in their personnel they were only councils of Europeans. The early councils of the church were in personnel indeed more Greek than Latin, but they were not for that reason less limited. The Second Vatican Council assembled Fathers of every nationality and from every corner of the world on a scale that had never before been approximated. It is the first General Council that has really been general. It is only in these last years that a pope speaking urbi et orbi has really spoken to the whole world and not merely to the Roman world. . . . We stand, whether we like it or not, at the threshold of a great era, offering great opportunities and, as opportunities always do, carrying with it great dangers. <sup>66</sup>

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was elected at the age of 76 after the death of Pope Pius XII in 1958 to become the second Pope John XXIII. His short term as pope resulted in much output. He is credited with beginning a new age in the Roman Catholic Church. He wrote eight encyclicals, including Mater et Magistra and his most famous, Pacem in Terris. He urged reconciliation in the crises of Berlin, Cuba, and Algeria. He elevated the posts of bishop and cardinal. He sought to update the church. Notable among his accomplishments was the effort to make closer ties with Eastern Orthodox Churches, the sending of representatives to the World Council of Churches, and especially the calling of the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council, The Second General Vatican Council of 1962-1965, the close of which he did not live to see, for he died in 1963. <sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 109-110

<sup>67</sup> John P. Donnelly, "Pope John XXIII," Eerdmans' Handbook, 639.

It was to come of us good news to hear Pope John XXIII refer to us as "separated brethren" rather than heretics. However, are we not all "scattered brethren" or "scattered siblings"--Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Pretestant, sectarian--? Do not we all have to return?

But where have we been? From where do we return? To where do we return? What oikos?

The matter of unity is variously seen. The ideal of unity is drawn from the seventeenth chapter of John where Jesus prays for all to be one. Indeed, some of us can remember how on the very day of his death, June 3, 1963, the television news related how John XXIII was meditating upon this scripture and offering his suffering in his hope for Christian hope. That scripture had become a part of the very soul of John XXIII.

But shall there be One Big Church? Or shall there be a union of churches without necessarily unity? Or something in between? And if that, of what manner?

However it is seen, an "ecumenical fellowship is growing around the world," according to Claud Nelson. "It is a challenge to the churches, all churches, to reflect whether it is not indeed the stirring of the Holy Spirit." This was the spirit of Vatican II.<sup>68</sup>

An overview of the Ecumenical Councils is facilitating to our sense of history as Christians. Therefore, a chronology of the Twenty-One Ecumenical Councils is placed in the Appendix that can function as an overlay for the material just covered.

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<sup>68</sup> Nelson, 113-119.

The twenty-one councils just discussed are the ones recognized by the Roman Catholic Church. Eastern Orthodox Churches recognize only the councils before the split between East and West. The Assyrian Church recognizes only the councils up to the Council of Ephesus in 431. The Coptic Churches in Egypt and Ethiopia, as well as the Armenian Church, the Monophysites, that is, accept no councils after the condemnation of the Monophysite doctrine. The Church of England has recognized no council after the Reformation split-off, namely the Councils of Trent, Vatican I, or Vatican II. Nor have the Church of England or the Post-Reformation Churches recognized any councils between the East-West schism and the Reformation. Indeed, it comes down to this: of the twenty-one councils discussed above, all twenty-one are recognized by the Roman Catholic Church; the first seven--or at times, the first eight--are accepted by the Eastern Orthodox Churches; Anglicans and Protestants recognize the first seven--although they are not very affirmative of the Third Council of Ephesus 431 which named Mary as Mother of God; The Assyrian Church recognizes the first two; and the Coptic and Armenian, the first three.<sup>69</sup>

From the perspective of Eastern Orthodoxy, the view is of another kind than of the West. In 1846, the Russian theologian Alexis Khomiakov wrote: "All Protestants are Crypto-Papists. . . . To use the concise language of algebra, all the West knows but one datum a; whether it be preceded by the positive sign +, as with the Roman-

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<sup>69</sup> Pike, 50-58.

ists, or with the negative -, as with the Protestants, the a remains the same."<sup>70</sup> (See Plate III. Source: Francis M. Rogers, The Quest For Eastern Christians. We can all find our places on Roger's chart.)

It is as Timothy Ware said, "In the west it is usual to think of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism as opposite extremes; but to an Orthodox they appear as two sides of the same coin. Khomiakov calls the Pope 'the first Protestant,' 'the father of German rationalism' and by the same token he would doubtless have considered the Christian Scientist an eccentric Roman Catholic."<sup>71</sup>

Ware continues:

For more than nine hundred years the Greek East and the Latin West have been growing steadily apart, each following its own way, yet in the early centuries of Christendom both sides can find common ground. Athanasius and Basil lived in the east, but they belong also to the west; and Orthodox who live in France, Britain, or Ireland can in their turn look upon the national saints of these lands --Alban and Patrick, Cuthbert and Bede, Genevieve of Paris and Augustine of Canterbury--not as strangers but as members of their own Church. All Europe was once as much part of Orthodoxy as Greece and Christian Russia are today.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps the issue is not, in the language of Vatican II, for the "separated brethren" to return home to Rome, but for all the separated siblings to return to an older home, of Eastern Orthodoxy; or perhaps to an even earlier home.

According to Ware, there were three main divisions of Chris-

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<sup>70</sup> Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1964), 9.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

tendom. The first stage came in the fifth and sixth centuries resulting in such groups as the Nestorians, the Monophysites, the Jacobites, and the Coptics. The second, came in 1054 when the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox divided into two communions. The third, came in the division between Rome and the Protestant Reformers in the sixteenth century.<sup>73</sup>

Ware mentions the "Branch Theory" that once was popular among High Church Anglicans according to which the three main "branches" of the Catholic Church are the Roman Catholic, the Anglican, and the Orthodox. This is not an acceptable idea to Eastern Orthodoxy because Eastern Orthodoxy sees itself as the only True Church and any "branches" would in its definition mean the various churches of the Orthodox communion.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, Ware points out that because Eastern Orthodoxy stands outside the "circle of ideas in which western Christians have moved for the past eight centuries"--the Middle Ages, Scholasticism, Reformation, Counter-Reformation--Orthodoxy indeed has an ecumenical role to play and that is to challenge the "accepted formulae of the Latin west. . ." from the particular perspective they have.<sup>75</sup>

However, Eastern Orthodoxy has not exactly stood still in these intervening eight centuries. A list of Orthodox doctrinal statements since 787 C.E. as presented by Ware include: The Encyclical

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 333.

Letter of Saint Photius (867); The Decisions of the Councils of Constantinople on the Hesychast Controversy (1341 and 1351); The Encyclical Letter of Saint Mark of Ephesus (1440-1441); The Replies of Jeremias II to the Lutherans (1573-1581); The Orthodox Confession by Peter of Moghila, in its revised form (ratified in 1642); The Answers of the Orthodox Patriarchs to the Non-Jurors (1718, 1723); The Reply of the Orthodox Patriarchs to Pope Pius IX (1848); The Encyclical Letters by the Patriarchate of Constantinople on Christian unity and on the "Ecumenical Movement" (1920, 1952).<sup>76</sup>

It seems to me what Orthodoxy has accomplished and what Western Christians have accomplished in the intervening time are all worthy of examination. And we can challenge the contention of Ware's that all that happened in the West have been "crystallizations and fossilizations."<sup>77</sup>

I think Ware's most outstanding statement, one that I would turn around to apply to the West, regarding the ecumenical role of Orthodoxy, might be:

And yet, if Orthodox are to fulfill this role properly, they must understand their own Tradition better than they have done in the past; and it is the west in its turn which can help them to do this. Orthodox must thank their younger brothers, for through contact with Christians of the west--Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist, Quaker--they are being enabled to acquire a new vision of Orthodoxy.<sup>78</sup>

For, an important aspect is that self understanding comes in contact with others.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

How does Eastern Orthodoxy see itself?

Ware writes that Orthodoxy sees itself as universal, as having the right belief, the right glory, and the right worship. Orthodoxy sees itself as "nothing less than the Church of Christ on earth."<sup>79</sup>

Ware continues that Eastern Orthodoxy sees the early history of the Church as Western Christians do. The church spread from Jerusalem, experienced persecution and martyrdom, and became the religion of the Roman Empire with the conversion of Constantine. Three events, according to Ware, marked the coming of age of the Church--the Edict of Milan in 313 which proclaimed the official toleration of Christian faith, the foundation of Constantinople, and the Council of Nicaea in 325.<sup>80</sup>

The first seven of the General Councils are important to Eastern Orthodoxy. Saint John Chrysostom, "John of the Golden Mouth," the monk of Antioch who was elected Bishop of Constantinople at the time of the Third Ecumenical Council, but later banished, is perhaps the most beloved of the church fathers to Eastern Orthodoxy, and his are the most widely read of the church writings. At Chalcedon the final establishment of the Pentarchy, so important to the Eastern Orthodox concept of the five great Sees of the Church, was set with the order of rank: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. All five Sees claimed to be of Apostolic foundation. The bishop in each had the title of Patriarch. The whole of the

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<sup>79</sup> Ware, 16.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 20-28.



known world was divided among them.<sup>81</sup>

Ware attempts to clear up two misconceptions regarding the Pentarchy. First, it is an ecclesiastical organization of Patriarchs and Metropolitans. All bishops are considered to be equal and to share equally in the apostolic succession and all have the same sacramental powers since they are seen to all have been divinely appointed to teach the faith. Every diocesan bishop is entitled to attend a General Council, to speak and vote. The basic unit of the church community was the church in a given city with its bishop each assisted by presbyters (priests) and deacons. It was the bishop who celebrated the eucharist. And each church, as it celebrated the eucharist, was then the whole Church in its fullness. Secondly, among the five Patriarchs, a special place belongs to the Pope because Rome was the city of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and where Peter was bishop. But the concept of Papal authority that was set up during Vatican I in 1870 is not acceptable to Eastern Orthodoxy. The Pope has a factor of primacy, not supremacy, and is first among equals.<sup>82</sup>

The ending of the Iconoclast dispute at the Seventh General Council concludes a major theological period for Orthodoxy. Next to the Bible, Eastern Orthodoxy takes the period of the Seven Councils as its standard and guide.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 28-34.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 21 and 35-36.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

Of the break between East and West, Ware gives the Orthodoxy view:

One summer afternoon in the year 1054, as a service was about to begin in the Church of the Holy Wisdom at Constantinople, Cardinal Humbert and two other legates of the Pope entered the building and made their way up to the sanctuary. They had not come to pray. They placed a Bull of Excommunication upon the altar and marched out once more. As he passed through the western door, the Cardinal shook the dust from his feet with the words: 'Let God look and judge.' A deacon ran out after him in great distress and begged him to take back the Bull. Humbert refused; and it was dropped in the street.

It is this incident which has conventionally been taken to mark the beginning of the great schism between the Orthodox east and the Latin west. But the schism, as historians now generally recognize, is not really an event whose beginning can be exactly dated. It was something that came about gradually as the result of a long and complicated process, starting well before the eleventh century and not completed until some time after. <sup>84</sup>

The major issues were Papal claims and the filioque. Other factors were: language, as more and more people came to speak less both Greek and Latin; the rise of Islam; the crowning of Charlemagne on Christmas Day 800 by the Pope; the invasions of the Roman Empire by the barbarians and the onset of the Dark Ages. <sup>85</sup>

Bulgaria became a problem area as rival missionary efforts were conducted on different principles from East and West in a continuing conflict between Rome and Constantinople. Photius became alarmed, wrote an encyclical letter to the other Patriarchs in 867 to denounce the filioque and call all adhering to it as heretics. He called a council in Constantinople which excommunicated Pope

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 52-57.

Nicholas. It was then that Photius was deposed by the Emperor from being Patriarch. In 869 an "Anti-Photian Council" was called in Constantinople which condemned Photius and which is in the West seen as the Eighth Ecumenical Council. In 877, Photius once more became Patriarch. In 879 another council was called which reversed the acts of the Council of 869. In terms of Eastern Orthodoxy, Photius was the victor. Photius has been seen in Eastern Orthodoxy as a saint, but in the West as the cause of schism and confusion. Only recently has he been seen in the West as a great churchman.<sup>86</sup>

After 1009, East and West were out of touch for the most part. The East did not include the name of the Pope of Rome on its lists. Much must be attributed to the climate of the times. The crusades made matters worse, especially with the pillaging of Constantinople in 1204.<sup>87</sup>

There were attempts to reconcile. In Lyons in 1274 a Council of reunion was held with Eastern delegates who agreed to recognize the papal claims and to recite the filioque with the Apostles Creed. This was the Second Council of Lyons, the Fourteenth General Council in terms of the West. The agreements reached at this Council were rejected by Eastern Orthodoxy in general--the union was off. In 1438-1439 a second Council of reunion was held in Florence. This was the Council of Basel-Farrara-Florence, the Seventeenth General Council of the West. The Patriarch of Constantinople and other

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<sup>86</sup> Ware, 63-65.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 65-69.

delegates attended. A plan of union was drawn up, but again Eastern Orthodoxy at large did not accept the union.<sup>88</sup>

Within Eastern Orthodoxy itself in the fourteenth century, there arose the Hesychast Controversy having to do with the nature of God and ways of knowing and having union with God. The Hesychasts believed they experienced a mystical light identical with the light the disciples saw with Jesus at Mount Tabor. This light they felt is a true vision of God in his energies. Two councils were held in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351, which although were not Ecumenical in the general sense, confer a doctrinal authority in this controversy to confirm the position of the Hesychasts. Western Christianity has not recognized these councils nor the doctrinal position they confirmed.<sup>89</sup>

Photius sent out the missionaries Cyril and Methodius to the north and northwest--the area of Moravia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Russia. The conversion of these areas was due to the work directly and indirectly of those two missionaries. Photius also sent a bishop to Russia. Kiev was the first great center of Christian Russia since Kiev was the chief city at that time. Eastern Orthodoxy was the state religion of Russia from that time until the Russian Revolution of 1917. Kiev was sacked by the Mongols in 1237, from which it never recovered. The center of Russian Christianity became Moscow in the fourteenth century. Indeed, the rise of Moscow was closely bound up with the development of the church

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 71-81.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 72-76.

and Christian faith there.<sup>90</sup>

The great saint of Russia was Sergius of Radonezh (?1314-1392) whose life is reminiscent of Saint Anthony of Egypt. He went into the forest, founded a hermitage, and gathered disciples with whom he founded a monastery to become in time the greatest religious house in Russia. In time fifty monasteries were founded with more after his death. These monks were not merely hermits, but missionaries who spread the faith to the pagan tribes of the deep forests. Sergius may have been influenced by the Hesychasts, for his religious expressions were of a deeply mystical nature. Sergius has been called a "Builder of Russia" in a threefold way: politically by the rise of Moscow, geographically by bringing monks into the forest who became missionaries, and spiritually by deepening the faith in Russia.<sup>91</sup>

Eastern Orthodoxy suffered under the Moslems. Christians under Islam were second class. They had to wear a distinctive dress and pay heavy taxes, could not serve in the army, marry Moslem women or carry out missionary work or seek to convert Moslems to Christian faith.<sup>92</sup>

While the Reformation and Counter-Reformation did not influence Eastern Orthodoxy directly, there were points of fall-out. Jesuits and Franciscans undertook missionary work in the east. In 1573 a delegation of Lutheran scholars from Tübingen visited Jeremias II,

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 82-91.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 93-95.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

The Patriarch of Constantinople and gave him a copy of the Augsburg Confession. Jeremias II wrote three Answers in reply in which he discussed doctrinal issues such as prayer, scriptures, and sacraments. There were other contacts between east and west. There were letters between them and there were councils, especially in the seventeenth century.<sup>93</sup>

In the 1600s, when the Patriarch Nikon tried to bring in Greek reforms, most notable was the issue of whether to make the sign of the cross with two fingers or with three. Nikon insisted the Russian tradition of using two fingers should be replaced by the Greek method of using three fingers. While this might seem trivial to some, it goes further than it might seem on the surface. For the issue was not merely over fingers. It was about modern verses traditional. It was also an issue of state and church. Nikon was trying to make the Church supreme over the State by appealing for a larger sense of the Church, a more total sense of the whole Orthodox Church.<sup>94</sup>

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, who had a prayer life with similarities to Saint John of the Cross of the West, and Saint Seraphim of Sarov--both of the eighteenth century--were notable figures that the West might want to learn more about.<sup>95</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Alexis Khomiakov (1804-1860), whose

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<sup>93</sup> Ware, 102-111.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 121-124.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 129-133.

words have appeared above, contributed to the field of theology, perhaps as Ware says, as the first original theologian in the history of Russian Christianity. Khomiakov tried to look at the issues of the west from the standpoint of the church itself. He was concerned with the doctrine, authority, and the unity of the church.<sup>96</sup>

During 1917 and 1918 an All-Russian Church Council was held in Moscow. The election of Patriarch Tikhon took place on November 5, 1917. During early sessions the Bolshevik shelling of the Kremlin could be heard. Before the council ended in the summer of 1918, news came that Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev had been murdered by the Bolsheviks. The Church was under persecution.<sup>97</sup>

Eastern Orthodoxy today is divided into two parts by the Iron Curtain. In some ways the church is persecuted as it was in the early time in the Roman Empire. In other ways, not. The Roman Empire was not an atheist state nor was the Moslem state that held the east. But Communism is committed to erasing all religion, according to Ware. Churches and seminaries have closed down, churches have been made into museums, and bishops have been put in prison. Patriarch Tikhon excommunicated the Bolsheviks who later put him in prison in the 1920s. He died in 1925. Later the acting Patriarchs Peter and Sergius were put in prison. In 1927 the concept of a Catacomb Church, also known as the Tikhon Church, came into being. In 1943, Stalin restored the Patriarchate, probably be-

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 137-138.

cause of the war. Sergius was made a full Patriarch. In addition to the Church in Russia, there exist also the Church of Serbia, the Church of Bulgaria, the Church of Romania, the Church of Georgia, the Church of Albania, the Church of Poland, the Church of Czechoslovakia, and their counterparts in such places as in America.<sup>98</sup>

Outside the Iron Curtain are seven Orthodox Churches: The Patriarchate of Constantinople which includes the Church of Finland, The Patriarchate of Alexandria, The Patriarchate of Antioch, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, The Church of Greece, The Church of Cyprus, and The Church of Sinai which consists of one monastery of Saint Catherine's on the Mountain of Moses.<sup>99</sup>

A twentieth century Diaspora of Eastern Orthodoxy has been developing. Orthodox persons have come to all parts of the world from their original places. Russian missionaries settled in North America as early as 1794. The Bolshevik Revolution drove out many Russians to other areas of the world. Tikhon in fact had issued a decree authorizing Russian bishops to set up organizations of their own if found in exile. So many Eastern Orthodox Churches have spread to other areas, with many found in the "West," a Western Orthodoxy has come to be. There are Orthodox in such diverse places as China, Japan, Alaska and Africa.<sup>100</sup>

Eastern Orthodoxy feels itself to be the one true Church--the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 139-179.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 180-199.



one, holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church of which the Apostles' Creed speaks. Its goal is for the reconciliation of all Christians to Eastern Orthodoxy. Reunion is not seen to be with Catholics, and Protestants only, but also with other Eastern traditions, such as the Nestorians and Monophysites.<sup>101</sup>

The Tübingen discussions from the sixteenth century have been opened again in the twentieth century. In addition, Eastern Orthodox observers have been present at ecumenical meetings, especially of The World Council of Churches.<sup>102</sup>

Nicolas Zernov wrote about two Russian students in 1923 who came to England to attend the Student Christian Movement Conference at Swanwick in Derbyshire. As refugees, they entertained doubts about western Christians, but found they professed a similar faith and went out of the meeting convinced Christian unity was urgent.<sup>103</sup>

Zernov went on to say that the growth of the Ecumenical Movement is the temper of contemporary Christians and is in sharp contrast to the hostility and separatism of previous eras; indeed, it is indication of a fundamental change. In the time that Zernov wrote these words, reunion had only been concerned with Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism--1961. He wrote: "It has not yet effected the main divisions of Christendom, and this is particularly true in the case of the fatal breach between the Christian East and the Christian West."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ware, 315-320.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 329-331.

<sup>103</sup> Nicolas Zernov, Orthodox Encounter (London: Clarke, 1961), xi.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 2.

Much has happened since Nicolas Zernov wrote. Both the Ecumenical Movement and Ecumenism, not to be confused with each other, have come a long way. Certainly the Ecumenical Movement is part of the rubric of Ecumenism.

Paul S. Minear wrote:

The whole story of ecumenical movement is, of course, so long and so colorful that it defies any summary. Basically it is the story of all the efforts made by the people of God to bring their whole existence into obedience to the unity and wholeness intended for them by their Lord. The story begins therefore at the very beginning, when God called into existence his covenant people and gave to them a special mission. The events of the Exodus from Egypt and the revelation on Sinai thus belong within the story. Ever since then, God's calling of his people has been creative of their unity and of their mission. But there has also been disunity and rejection of this mission. The story will doubtless continue as long as this struggle continues, or until the full realization of God's kingdom on earth. 105

Stephen Charles Neill, who wrote with R. Rouse on the history of the Ecumenical Movement, observed that prior to Constantine, church unity had been seen in terms of "unity of faith, worship, and Church as an organization, and on unity in organization as the outward expression of its inner oneness." According to Neill, 1054 can no longer be seen as the date of the break between East and West. The events of that time are obscured and complex. But more communion between East and West are now seen to have existed than formerly supposed. Some feel it was the Crusades that made the breach. The issues of Islam are unknown factors. 1204, the sack of Constantinople, is a decisive date. But such separation as there

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<sup>105</sup> Paul S. Minear, ed., The Nature of the Unity We Seek (St. Louis: Abbott, 1958), 11.

was, issued in the various attempts of reconciliation such as the Second Council of Lyons in May 1274 and the Council of Ferrara-Florence of 1438-39.<sup>106</sup>

Neill points out that most church history is written from the stance of the orthodox; thus the divergent movements when seen as being out of the main line of Christian development give rise to a preoccupation of church history as being between heresy and orthodox. We therefore often see the church before the Reformation as we see it before the time of the "heresies" of the early church--as united before some agency came to break that unity. This, in turn leaves us as not mindful of the dissensions that acted within that history. These include, during the time before the Reformation: St. Francis and his followers, the Waldensians, the Cathari, and others. There was infiltration of Manicheanism, Gnostic therefore, dualistic ideas in some of the sects that abounded prior to the Reformation. There was then, according to Neill, that tendency in the church history written in the West to see the Church as being in a "blissful unity" until Martin Luther broke it up. But that was more of a myth than a reality--for the Church existed in about three great blocks that were: the West centered in Rome, the Eastern Churches centered in Moscow, and the lesser of the Eastern Churches centered in Islam Turkey.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Stephen Charles Neill, "Introduction," A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948 ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 8.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 20-23.

Neill wrote:

Even the more conservative forms of Protestantism represented a more radical breach with the past than anything since the Gnostic heresies. The most serious factor of all was the acquiescence in division, which became the basis of all post-Reformation settlements of religion. By 1555 it had become clear that the Reformation was not going to capture the whole Church. By the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the boundaries between the Roman and non-Roman Churches were drawn almost exactly as they have remained to the present day. 108

To see the Reformation only in terms of what was happening in the Church is to get an incomplete picture. In many ways a new age had started of new inventions, new explorations, and new scientific outlooks. Columbus had sailed to America. New trade routes had opened up. The world had to think of itself in terms of vastly expanded openings.

The Church itself had become corrupt with negligence, ignorance, absenteeism, and the sexual immorality that were widespread even among the clergy. Martin Luther was shocked by what he saw in Rome in 1510. The threats of bubonic plague and Turkish oppression acted on the Church as well as all society. Those living on the Mediterranean, especially, constantly lived in fear of Turkish raiding parties. Europe itself was expanding. Martin Luther had been age five when Bartholomeu Diaz had rounded the Cape of Good Hope; he had been age nine when Columbus discovered America; and he had been age fifteen when Vasco da Gama had found his sea-route to India. In fact Luther had lived through the times of Cabot, Cortez, Magellan,

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Ibid., 24.

and Pizarro.<sup>109</sup>

The word Renaissance has been applied to the cultural change that came over Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The humanist authors that wrote in the vein of Lovati, Petrarch, and Boccassio, and that included Machiavelli and Mirandola, influenced the thinking of society. Gutenberg had invented his printing press in 1456, so that here was a paved way for the new translations of the Bible, as well as the humanist writings and the writings of Luther and the other reformers to get dispersed.<sup>110</sup>

The Council of Trent has been called the most important ecumenical council between that of Nicaea in 325 and that of Vatican II in 1962-1965. It was held in three main sessions: 1545-1547, 1551-1552, and 1562-1563. Trent was an attempt to work out the problems between the Catholic Church and the Protestants. In this attempt it was a failure. Its main contribution was to shape the response of Roman Catholicism to Protestantism. Attendance was scanty with Italians contributing the most numbers. Passions were high at Trent. At times there were physical struggles among the delegates. The second session was the one attended by Protestants. However, no Lutherans or Calvinists came. Trent, nevertheless, dealt with issues raised by the Reformation. Those such as transubstantiation, justification by faith and works, the seven sacraments, celibacy

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<sup>109</sup> Philip McNair, "Seeds of Renewal," in Dowley, Eerdmans' Handbook, 346-347.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 348-353.

of the clergy, purgatory, and indulgences were affirmed. However, the abuses of indulgence selling were done away with. Trent was for Roman Catholicism a strengthening of doctrine. For Protestants, Trent was a wall against any reconciliation.<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps a higher attendance all concerned, and especially if Lutherans and Calvinists had come, would have brought better results for reconciliation. As it was, each side began its own journey into the uncertain future which still goes on.

The Jesuit Order received papal approval in 1540 to become part of the Counter-Revolution. The Inquisition was revived and became a means to combat Protestantism. Books were banned. Catholic mysticism was revived by such people as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. This mysticism filled a need which in some places was filled by joining Pretestantism. Religious wars broke out. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 set up the co-existence of Lutheran and Catholic in Germany by allowing the prince of each region to decide the faith of the subjects under him. In France the issue was between the Huguenots and Catholics. Religious freedom was granted the Huguenots by the Edict of Nantes in 1598. This Edict was revoked in 1685, an act that caused thousands to flee from France. The last of the religious wars, the Thirty Years' War of 1618-1648, between the Calvinists and Catholics, was resolved by the Peace of Westphalia. But the war left Germany devastated. The religious lines

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<sup>111</sup> Robert D. Linder, "Rome Responds," in Dowley, Eerdmans' Handbook, 408-411.

that were drawn by the Peace of Westphalia were much as they had been in 1529 and remain much that way today.<sup>112</sup>

Many Protestants came to North America beginning in the seventeenth century. A combination of missionary effort, desire for religious freedom, and commercial motives brought them. By the beginning of the 1700s, these American churches seemed to have fallen into some kind of sleep. But around the 1730s and 1740s a Great Awakening began to occur in the North American colonies as well as in Europe. This Great Awakening involved the Methodist Revival in Britain and the Pietist Movement in continental Europe. Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Philip Jacob Spener, John and Charles Wesley, Howell Harris, and William McCulloch were important figures in this Revival. Growing out of the Awakening were the missionary organizations--the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792, the London Missionary Society in 1795, and the Church Missionary Society in 1799. Hannah Ball and Robert Raikes started the Sunday School Movement in 1769. Movements to abolish slavery, to reform prisons, to provide relief, and to treat the sick began.<sup>113</sup>

Christian missions, Catholic and Protestant, and European colonization were together as they expanded into the world. Slavery made Christian missions in Africa difficult before 1800. Father Junipero Serra was a notable missionary in California. The first Protestant missionary society had been started in 1649--Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) had begun in 1698. The Society

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 412-422.

<sup>113</sup> A. Skevington Wood, "Awakening," Eerdmans' Handbook, 434-455.

for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) had begun in 1701. Eastern churches, especially from Russia, produced mission programs. It was the mission programs that made Christianity a world wide faith.<sup>114</sup>

It was also the mission programs that led to problems and eventually to the modern efforts of ecumenism.

To begin with, the Industrial Revolution, the rise and fall of the empires of Europe, and the missionary movement were all inter-related. In the 1800s missionary interest in Africa was stepped up. The relations between the colonial governments and the mission programs were often at cross points. But they seemed to need each other. The mission programs have associated with the rise of colonialism. Yet they also have been associated with the factors that brought the destruction of colonialism. At first in fact, especially in the late 1700s, the rise of missions was associated with the cause to abolish slavery. By the 1850s, Christian missions engaged in commercial trading. Eventually this practice died out. Education became an important part of missionary work. Rivalry became to develop among the various mission programs, especially between Catholic and Protestant ones. A "scramble for Africa" became mixed with political factors.<sup>115</sup>

These factors are still present.

As early as 1789, Christian faith seemed to be mainly a religion mainly of Caucasians of Europe and America. By now it has spread to every part of the world and growing most rapidly in

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<sup>114</sup> James A. De Jong, "Expansion World Wide," Eerdmans' Handbook, 460-478.

<sup>115</sup> A. F. Walls, "Outposts of Empire," Eerdmans' Handbook, 546-568.



the southern hemisphere, especially in Africa and Latin America. Strangely and ironically, Christian faith is receding among the Caucasians of Europe and America.<sup>116</sup>

The modern missionary movement, which can be dated with 1790, changed the church so that by 1910, the church was world-wide.<sup>117</sup>

The Gospel had indeed been preached through all the world.

When World War I broke out, the church was like a multitude of people of many nations, tribes, and tongues.<sup>118</sup>

The twentieth century has been liberally and variously characterized. With two World Wars and an extreme upswing of technology, this century is like the sudden bursting of a flower from the bud of earlier centuries.<sup>119</sup>

It has been said that the great world religions have been supplanted by three post-Christianity isms--nationalism, communism, and individualism. As the twentieth century began, humanists and social Christians were proclaiming that a better world, the kingdom of God, even, was at hand. Yet others felt that science, the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 546.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 568.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 568.

<sup>119</sup> A great aunt of mine left and ruined her bread dough to go outside to look at one of the first airplanes ever to fly. Her husband had courted her in a horse drawn buggy. Now one can fly from Los Angeles to New York in four hours, human feet have walked on the moon, and even at this moment a space probe is on its way to relay information back about the outer planets of this solar system. We all can relate such accounts--they indicate the world in which we now exist.

evils of the Industrial Revolution and even urbanization were factors for despair. In spite of peace movements, war occurred. The Russian Revolution, the failure of the League of Nations, Nazi Germany, World War II, the Cold War, The Nations; there are only a few of the major events of the Twentieth Century.<sup>120</sup>

Twentieth century theological figures have been: Adolf von Harnack, Albert Schweitzer, B. B. Warfield, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, Ernst Kasemann, Hans Kung, Harvey Cox, Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Segundo, Jose Bonino, Jose Miranda, J. S. Mbiti, H. Sawyerr, Raymond Pannikar, and Sabapathy Kulandran, among others.<sup>121</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., worked for black civil rights in the United States. King and many other black civil rights leaders came from the ranks of the clergy.<sup>122</sup> Toyohiko Kagawa was a well known reformer in Japan.<sup>123</sup> Billy Graham, in the 1950s, began his world wide crusades.<sup>124</sup> Helder Camara, in South America, worked for the rights of the poor and for non-violence.<sup>125</sup> It can be seen

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<sup>120</sup> Richard Pierard, "An Age of Ideology," in Dowley, Eerdmans' Handbook, 570-591.

<sup>121</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, "An Age of Anxiety," Eerdman's Handbook, 594-611.

<sup>122</sup> Pierard, Eerdmans' Handbook, 591.

<sup>123</sup> S. Funski, "Toyohiko Kagawa, Eerdmans' Handbook, 615.

<sup>124</sup> Richard Pierard, "Billy Graham," Eerdmans' Handbook, 623.

<sup>125</sup> C. Rene Padilla, "Helder Camara," Eerdmans' Handbook, 637.

that the Third World is represented. Major finds included discoveries at Ras Shamra in 1929 on the site of the ancient city of Ugarit, at Nag Hammadi in 1945, at the Dead Sea in 1947, and in Jericho in the 1950s.<sup>126</sup>

The twentieth century was young when the First World Missionary Conference met in Edinburgh in 1910. Edinburgh was the end of an age, wrote Rene Padilla, and the beginning of another. 1200 representatives came, 8 of whom were from India, 1 from Burma, 3 from China, 1 from Korea, and 4 from Japan. None came from Latin America. The church, though a global network, by then, yet reflected the political colonialism.<sup>127</sup>

"Ecumenism," in the modern sense of the word was coined and used by Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760). Zinzendorf was a pastor, teacher, theologian, missionary, hymn writer, and administrator. As a pioneer in ecumenism, he tried to unite all Christians in the work of evangelism.<sup>128</sup>

Ecumenism in the twentieth century sense began in the Student Volunteer Movement, which was a forerunner of the Student Christian Movement, which the students of which Zernov wrote as mentioned earlier were attending, and which was dedicated to evangelism.<sup>129</sup> Zinzendorf would have been in the middle of it.

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<sup>126</sup> Thiselton, in Dowley, Eerdmans' Handbook, 606-607.

<sup>127</sup> C. Rene Padilla, "An Age of Liberation," Eerdmans' Handbook, 613.

<sup>128</sup> A. Shevington Wood, "Count Von Zinzendorf," Eerdmans' Handbook, 477.

<sup>129</sup> Colin Buchanan, "Organizing for Unity," Eerdmans' Handbook, 634.

Ruth Rouse talks about the "convergent movements" that have produced the modern ecumenical movement. Major were the Young Men's Christian Association, The Young Women's Christian Association, and the Student Christian Movement. Begun as youth movements, they have become "lay movements." Begun in the nineteenth century, they were not Churches, but have provided pioneer activity in ecumenism. One way was to feed into the Student Volunteer Movement organized in the wake of the 1910 Conference. This movement was world-wide.<sup>130</sup>

The Student Volunteer Movement was but one of the strands to come out of the World Missionary Conference of 1910, which met under the leadership of John R. Mott. In 1921 The International Missionary Council was formed. This council met in Jerusalem in 1928 and in Madras in 1938. In 1961 at the General Assembly in New Delhi, India, it merged with The World Council of Churches.<sup>131</sup>

Also from the Edinburgh Conference began the Faith and Order Movement, which met for the first time in 1927 in Lausanne, and included Eastern Orthodox delegates. The second meeting was in Edinburgh in 1937 and proposed the formation of a World Council of Churches.<sup>132</sup>

A third movement out of Edinburgh was the Life and Work Movement. Meetings were held in Stockholm in 1925 and in Oxford in 1937. The Oxford meeting led to the proposal that Life and Work

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<sup>130</sup> Ruth Rouse, "Other Aspects of the Ecumenical Movement 1910-1948" in Rouse and Neill, 599-603;

<sup>131</sup> Buchanan, Eerdmans' Handbook, 634.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

unite with Faith and Order to become one World Council of Churches. In 1938 a meeting was held in Utrecht to establish the World Council of Churches with headquarters in Geneva. The process was delayed by World War II. Finally in 1948 The World Council of Churches was formed and met in Amsterdam.<sup>133</sup>

The First Assembly of The World Council of Churches met in Amsterdam in 1948; The Second, in Evanston in 1954; The Third, in New Delhi in 1961; The Fourth, in Uppsala in 1968; The Fifth, in Nairobi in 1975.<sup>134</sup> The Sixth met in Vancouver in 1983.

The contribution by the Third World can be seen in several factors. That New Delhi, India and Nairobi, Kenya were sites of Assembly meetings is in itself indicative.

The New Delhi Assembly began on a Sunday morning, November 19, 1961 with several thousand worshipping in and out around the big tent--the Shamiana. Roman Catholic observers were present. Eastern Orthodox and many churches from Pacific and African areas were received into membership. And it was at New Delhi that the calls for more accommodation for the Third World churches was sounded.<sup>135</sup>

Third World churches have been on the increase in the membership of The World Council of Churches in great part because of their independence from the mission programs of the mainline denom-

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 634-635.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 635.

<sup>135</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed. The New Delhi Report (New York: Association Press, 1962), 1-55.

inations which gave them rise, in part because of the independence of the nations themselves. This trend of both kinds of independence accelerated after World War II. This trend, revolutionary in essence, produced in the young World Council of Churches a need to reflect the issues involved. For the WCC in its beginning had reflected, as pointed out above, the European and North American stances--but at New Delhi, the Third World began to be heard. The churches have brought a pluralism to the WCC with other issues than the European/North American ones. Doctrinal and theological unity has found less emphasis with a need to point to justice and the plight of the poor and the oppressed to come to the fore.

Change has come about. There is a new relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Not only did John XXIII send observers to New Delhi, but as Colin Buchanan says, "The emergence of the Church of Rome as a partner in ecumenical discussion and the impact of the charismatic movement, has totally changed ecumenical relationships." <sup>136</sup>

Ralph M. Wiltgen reported on the opening of Vatican II, which made an opening for a change. He wrote that on Thursday, October 11, 1962, on the Feast of the Divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin, a long white procession of some 2400 bishops came down the Royal Staircase and through the Bronze Door to come out onto the Square, then turned again, and reascended the stairs to go into the main entrance of St. Peter's Basilica. Pope John XXIII appeared and gave the prayer asking for guidance from the Holy Spirit. Mass

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<sup>136</sup> Buchanan, Eerdman's Handbook, 636.

was served. The Book of the Gospels was placed on the altar in the custom of the earliest ecumenical councils. Vatican II had begun.<sup>137</sup>

The change of which Buchanan wrote could be seen by those of us on the parish level. Even if we had not heard of Vatican II, or The World Council of Churches, or the Ecumenical Movement, we could see that something had changed. We are meeting in Ecumenical dialogue. I was privileged to be a part of such a dialogue as Protestants, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox met to discuss the various interpretations of such articles of faith as baptism, scriptures, and eucharist, among others. We Protestants have rediscovered the Gregorian music. And Roman Catholics are singing Martin Luther's music. There is change at the grassroots, in the pews and the pew racks.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ralph M. Wiltgen, The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber (Dover, England: Augustine Publishing, 1978), 13-14.

<sup>138</sup> I can speak of what I personally have seen of this change. In 1962, while a patient at Mercy Hospital in San Diego, which is run by Roman Catholics, in the hall one day, I picked up from the leaflet rack a small tract on Martin Luther. As a Protestant, I had always heard Luther described in heroic tones. This tract presented him from the Roman Catholic view as some beast that could not control his passions and lusts and who led a tangled group of heretics into perdition. That was pre-Vatican II. More recently, at a meeting of an Ecumenical Conference in a Roman Catholic Church, I noticed a hymn book in the pew rack with Martin Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." This was post-Vatican II.

COCU, a plan of union, Consultation On Church Union for The 170  
Church of Christ Uniting, was drawn up in 1970. It would have un-  
ited nine churches: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The  
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, The Christian Church (Dis-  
ciples of Christ), The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, The  
Episcopal Church, The Presbyterian Church in the U.S., The United  
Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church, and The United Pres-  
byterian Church in the U.S.A. "The church is one," declared COCU,  
"Yet the disunity of the visible companies of Christian people ob-  
scures this reality." COCU also declared that each church "takes  
justifiable pride in much of its heritage and history." The diver-  
sity of the national, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, along with the  
confessional origins "has often enriched our common heritage and  
will enrich the life of the uniting church." The plan of COCU was  
an attempt to give order of a contemporary organizational pattern  
for a church of a true catholic nature, as well as evangelical, and  
reformed, a church of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." 139

COCU was to be studied during 1970-1972 by the churches in-  
cluded in the plan. 140 This was done and at the time generated  
much inspiration which has since pretty much died down. Or so it  
seems to me; as I hear less about it and see less written.

The International Congress On World Evangelization was held  
in Lausanne, Switzerland from July 16 to July 25, 1974. There were  
2,473 participants who came from 150 countries around the world.

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<sup>139</sup> Consultation On Church Union, A Plan of Union for The Church  
of Christ Uniting (Princeton, New Jersey: COCU, 1970), 1-14.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.



135 Protestant denominations were represented. The Congress issued the Lausanne Covenant which contains fifteen sections dealing with such rubrics as--The Purpose of God, The Authority and Power of the Bible, The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ, The Power of the Holy Spirit, and The Return of Christ, among others. It is called a "detailed outline for an evangelical theology of mission." Clause 1 of the Covenant begins: "We affirm our belief in the one eternal God, Creator and Lord of the world, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who governs all things according to the purpose of his will."<sup>141</sup>

This voice from the Evangelicals offers another dimension to the discussion of ecumenism. The affirmation of faith that is drawn up in the Lausanne Covenant has similarities to the work of Nicaea I and the other church councils that sought to describe the faith they believed.

In Nairobi, Kenya, from November 23 to December 10, 1975, the Fifth Assembly of The World Council of Churches met in the Kenyatta Conference Centre. Two-hundred-eighty-six member churches were represented by 676 voting delegates. There were 95 fraternal delegates from related organizations, 35 delegated observers from churches that were non-members (this included 16 from the Roman Catholic Church), some 60 guests, 110 advisers, 250 staff persons, 180 stewards, and some 600 press members.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> C. Rene Padilla, ed., The New Face of Evangelicalism (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1976), 9-17.

<sup>142</sup> David M. Paton, ed., Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975 (London: SPCK, 1976), ix-4.

David M. Paton, in Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975, the official proceedings, wrote that all the WCC Assemblies have been different from the others. Amsterdam 1948 struggled with the Cold War. Evenston 1954 had brought more structure to the WCC as well as bringing the WCC to the North American continent. New Delhi 1961 saw the International Missionary Council merged with the WCC as well as the joining of the Russian Orthodox and Eastern European Orthodox and Pentecostal churches of South America. Roman Catholic observers attended New Delhi. Uppsala 1968 dealt with anti-racist and anti-colonialist issues, as well as institute the programs to Combat Racism and Promote Development.<sup>143</sup>

Paton described the opening of The Fifth Assembly. The 2000 participants came together on the steps, the balconies, and the plaza of the Kenyatta Centre. The beating of drums rose to a climax and then became silent. All became quiet as the scriptures were read by persons from all parts of the world. Pastor Glass and allies of Dr. Ian Paisley from Glasgow disrupted by shouting "Anti-Christ!" Prayer was offered by Philip Potter, General Secretary. The worship leaders entered led by a Masai girl with a Swahili Bible. Hymns were sung in Swahili. A sermon was given. The postlude was played on drums and the Assembly members dispersed.<sup>144</sup>

Philip Potter said the mood of the Assembly could be summed up by the litany that was often used: "Break down the walls that separate us and unite us in a single body."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 5-7.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., x.

The Sixth Assembly met in Vancouver, Canada, from July 24 to August 10, 1983 on the campus of the University of British Columbia. Membership was now over three hundred churches. The theme was, "Jesus Christ--the Life of the World." Counting the delegates (847 voting delegates), the visitors, the press, and other participants, over 4500 people took part in the Assembly every day. It was "A glorious patchwork"--as one of the images to describe it.<sup>146</sup>

An important item at Vancouver was Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, also known as Faith and Order Paper No. 111. Drawn up by Faith and Order members in Lima in 1982, this paper (also known as BEM), discussed and formulated statements on baptism, eucharist, and ministry from the various traditions they represented. The members included Roman Catholics and representatives from other churches not belonging to the WCC. As an example, from the statements of baptism: "In the course of history, the practice of baptism has developed in a variety of forms. Some churches baptize infants brought by parents or guardians who are ready, in and with the Church, to bring up the children in the Christian faith." It goes on to say that some churches have infants or children presented and blessed. Some churches have only the baptism of believers who make a confession of faith. But "All churches baptize believers coming from other religions or from unbelief who accept the Christian faith and participate in catechetical instructions."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>David Gill, ed., Gathered For Life (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), vii-7.

<sup>147</sup>World Council of Churches, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Geneva: WCC, 1982), viii and 4.

What is Ecumenism?

Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill wrote their classic book, A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948, out of the idea that church history has too often been written about the divisions in the church, but that they would take on the job of writing in terms of the efforts to achieve reconciliation.<sup>148</sup>

For there has been much effort through the centuries to bring unity and reconciliation.

Ecumenism, then, through the contents of this chapter, can be seen to be the continuing effort through Christian history to attain unity. When Jesus commanded that the Gospel be preached through all the world, that was the first ecumenical imperative. But unity never existed, not even among Jesus' own disciples.

The divisions that erupted were often the results of the very attempts for unity. The "heretics" were those who were disrupting the status quo. As a former minister of mine has said, we Christians have for the most part got rid of our problems by getting rid of people.

To discuss the "ecumenical" in any of its contexts is to discuss the effort at achieving unity. Nicaea I was called to get everybody concerned together to agree--on something. The same goes for the rest of the councils.

To talk about the "Ecumenical Movement," whether in terms of Zinzendorf, or of the Student Christian Movement, or of The World Council of Churches, or Vatican II--is to talk of the effort to

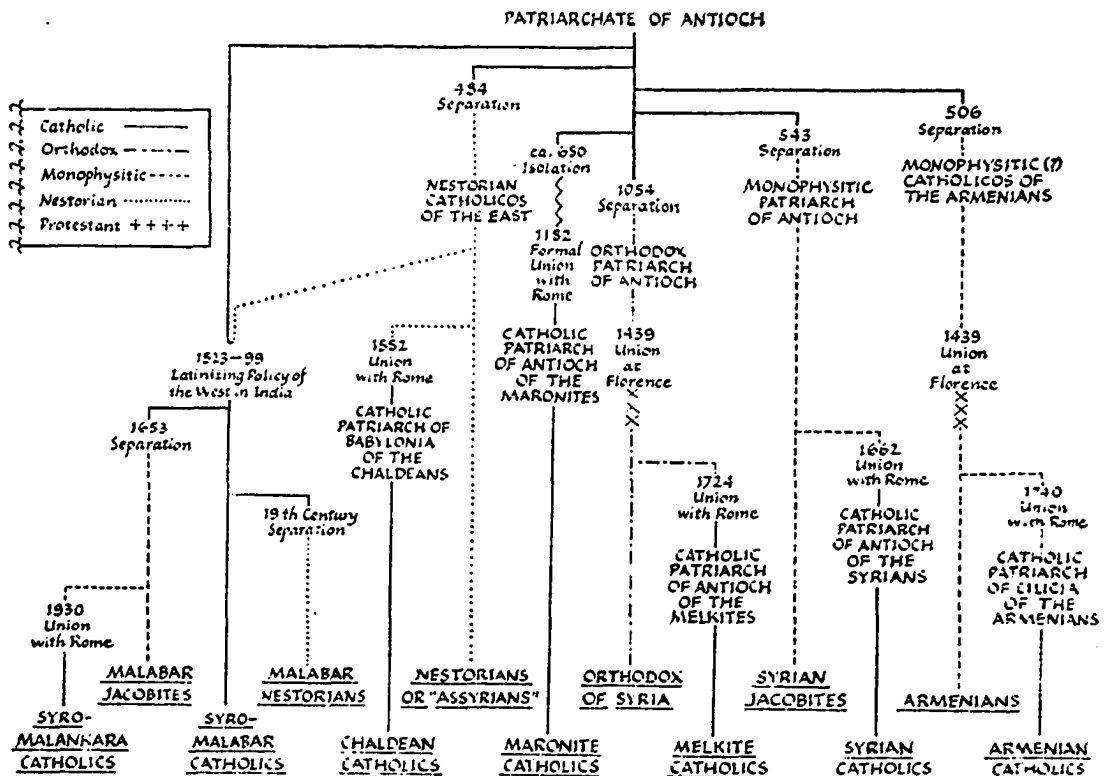
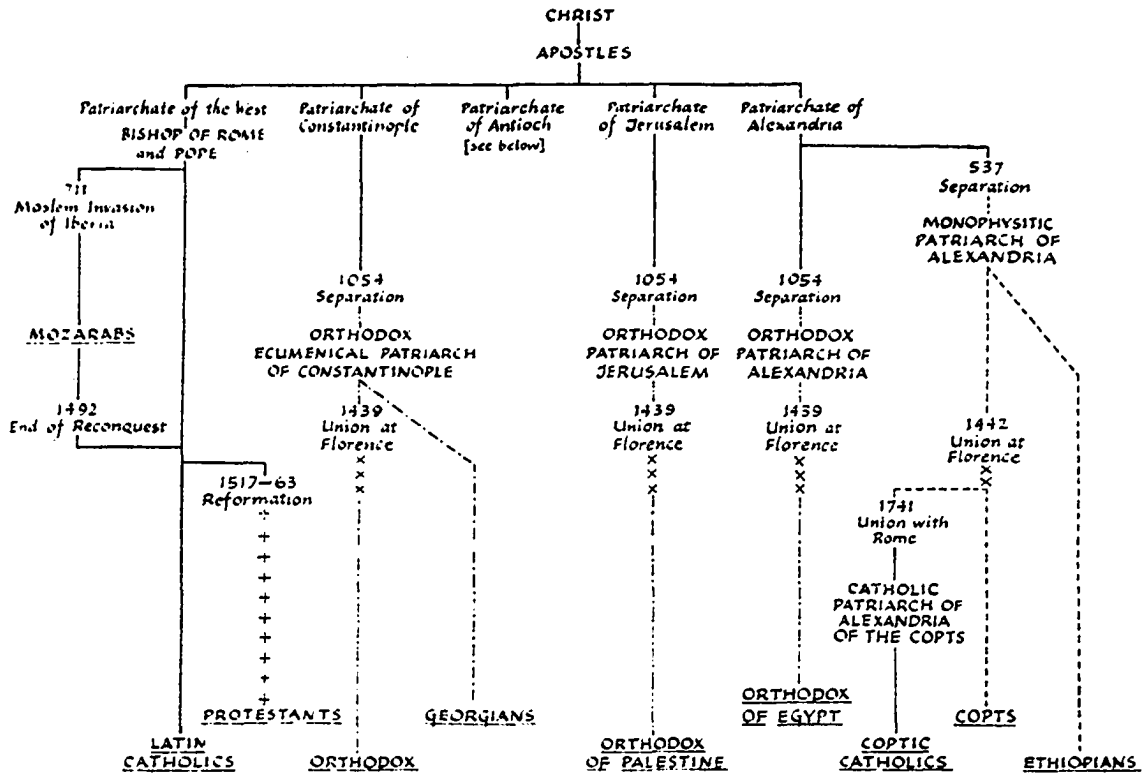
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<sup>148</sup> Reinold von Thadden-Trieglaff, "Introduction," in Rouse and Neill, xxi.

achieve Christian unity. The key concept is "effort." We keep trying. We must keep trying.

To think then about this continuing effort through two thousand years in the quest of unity and to discuss its relationship to the casting out of the first heresy--Gnosticism--is the task of the following chapter.

EASTERN ORTHODOX DIVISIONS



## CHAPTER 4

## The Dialectic Between Gnosticism and Ecumenism

"Dialectic" is defined as juxtaposed viewpoints to contrast and compare, thus illumine each side, to arrive at an additional viewpoint made up of elements from the primary ones.

Gnosticism and Ecumenism, I say, in trajectories, sigma-like, arc back and forth in the traveling from the past into the present and even into the future. Yet there is a shrouded mist like the fog of the Gospel of Truth.

Chapters 2 and 3 yielded tentative definitions of Gnosticism and Ecumenism. Gnosticism: perhaps an old Jewish form of apocalypticism perhaps developed out of a non-exilic strand from Samaria/Galilee out of which perhaps some strand that interacted with Judean post-exilic/Jewish tradition produced Christianity. Ecumenism: the continuing efforts by Christian faith through almost two thousand years to achieve unity. Gnosticism was part of our heritage at our roots and continued to impact us even as we developed away from it and it from us. Yet like some stubborn recessive gene in the DNA, Gnosticism continues to persist in Christian faith, not just in the "heresies" but in the "mainline" as well.

Gilles Quispel said that Gnosis is a perennial philosophy by citing the Albigenses, Jakob Boehm, and even Mozart as Gnostic.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Quispel, "Valentinian Gnosis and the Apocryphon of John," in Layton, vol. 1,

Elaine Pagels wrote that Gnostic Christianity existed like a suppressed underground river that surfaced now and then such as in the Middle Ages and in the Reformation itself. (Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," is filled with demons that might remind us of the Gnostic Archons.) She cites Jacob Boehme (like Quispel) and George Fox as persons who were probably not students of Gnostic traditions, yet whose religious lives contained Gnostic elements. She states the great movements of the Reformation--the Baptist, the Pentecostals, the Methodist, the Episcopalians, the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, and the Quakers (even though George Fox might have Gnostic qualities)--all remained inside orthodox faith. But such figures as Blake, Rembrandt, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche were all on the "edge" of orthodoxy.<sup>2</sup>

But I would argue that even though the "mainline" movements have been inside orthodoxy, they yet contain Gnostic elements. Baptists and Methodists have emphasized personal experience, such personal direct contact with Deity, that it is a knowing. John Wesley had his Aldersgate experience and knew that Jesus had saved him from his sins. He wrote: ". . . an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."<sup>3</sup>

Some Baptists emphasize more than others the necessity of knowing the exact time and place that salvation came. Presbyterians

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<sup>2</sup> Pagels, 179-180.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Burtner and Robert E. Chiles, ed., John Wesley's Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 101-102.



with the doctrine of predestination come close to the Valentinian aspect of the pneumas, phychics, and hylics. Some people are already saved, some can be saved, and some are just eternally lost. Quakers who wait silently for the inspiration of Spirit, thus indicating direct contact with Deity, are displaying the Gnostic. And even Roman Catholics who anoint the dying and say prayers to get the departed through purgatory are echoing the Gnostic tradition of anointing the dying and the tradition that the departed have to work their way past the Archons that guard the world prison--we saw the Gnostic traditions in Chapter 2. We really cannot know who had borrowed from whom, or what each set of traditions borrowed from from some common ancient tradition. But what if it was the Christian traditions that borrowed from the Gnostics?

Some Christian sects seem Gnostic. Jehovah's Witnesses with the tenet of a docetic and subordinate Jesus sound very Arian and perhaps Gnostic as well. Christian Science has been called as "Neo-Gnostic." Seventh Day Adventists are apocalypticists who await the end of earth's "probation" and the Second Coming of Christ. And "Mormon" in their very name of "Latter Day Saints" see themselves at the end of the world and as the establishment by divine authority as True Religion, indeed The Religion. And these groups do not see themselves as "sects."

We in mainline Protestantism who see ourselves over against Roman Catholics began as "sects" ourselves. We deviated from the "orthodox" in some way, even if Pagels would see us as movements within orthodoxy.

Jesus, in the Gospels and in the Gospel of Thomas, talked of

the leaven becoming spread through the dough. Images cannot be pushed too far because at some point the gap between the symbolized and the symbol will be too great. Yet to really look at dough being transformed by leaven is to enter a new form of thinking (and of seeing). And this is what dialectics is about.

We somehow think that dough is homogenous and that to leaven it will keep that homogeneity going. Yet the leaven forces the dough to be more than it was. It increases in volume as the agent of the leaven forces gas, whether air or carbon dioxide, between all the particles of flour, shortening, sugar and other ingredients. These particles are both separated from each other and bound together into a larger whole.

What would this look like when the Gospel is the leaven and the dough is the world?

Or, again, what would this look like with Gnosticism as part of the leaven?

Such concepts force us to move beyond our own conventionalities.

One conventionality is that of laughter. Or the non-laughter. As shown in Chapter 2, Jesus laughs. In fact, this stood out so much that John Dart named his book The Laughing Savior. (referred to in Chapter 1) Yet, we Christians are so grim. We have a notable lack of ability to laugh at ourselves.

Elton Trueblood wrote The Humor of Christ. He began by saying: "The widespread failure to recognize and to appreciate the humor of Christ is one of the most amazing aspects of the era named for Him."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Elton Trueblood, The Humor of Christ (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 15.

Trueblood begins his introduction by pointing out how the idea came to him. A family reading of Matthew 7 resulted by the four year old son laughing at the idea of specks and beams in people's eyes. For the child knew that no human eye is large enough to hold a beam of wood in it. His laughter startled his parents and was a rebuke "for their failure to respond to humor in an unexpected place." Trueblood then started to read the Gospels for humorous passages and wrote a whole book on it.<sup>5</sup>

Trueblood lists the reasons why we fail to see humor in the Gospels. First, the text is so familiar to us, and thus hallowed, that our responses to it are in fact blunted. Second, the story of the Passion and Crucifixion is so tragic we have come to see the sadness of that part as unhumorous and thus the nature of the whole as sad and unhumorous. We assume therefore that tragedy and humor cannot go together. Laughter, in fact, is redemptive if it goes beyond the immediate into a recognition of the common predicament of those involved.<sup>6</sup>

Trueblood sees the Synoptics as being closer to the time of Jesus and thus preserving more of his humor with John being further in time away and thus less humorous. He says the contrast between the Synoptics and John in this respect is striking.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, the Gospel of John has been found to be the book very much used by Gnostics. Pagels says it was claimed by the Gnostics and used as a primer.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 18-37.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>8</sup> Pagels, 143.

John, however, is not without humor. In Chapter 4, for example, in the story of the woman at the well, Trueblood does see humorous elements.<sup>9</sup> Jesus asks her for a drink of water. She is surprised he asks her for a drink, for she is Samaritan. He says that if she knew who he is, she would ask him for a drink, and he would have given her living water. And she says, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water?" (John 4:11, RSV) Read with some expression instead of the deadpan usually used on scriptural reading, this becomes funny. Or later in the story, the disciples return with food and tell him to eat. He tells them he has food to eat of that they do not know. They look at each other and ask each other, "Has any one brought him food?" (John 4:31-33, RSV) Again, read with some expression, this becomes a funny set of lines. In Chapter 9, the man blind from birth is healed by Jesus. Read with some expression, as I finally heard a minister read this passage, it becomes funny. I found myself almost laughing out in church. The blind man is besought by the Pharisees who are going to everyone involved to find out about this event.<sup>10</sup> It has some of the elements of the comedy routine, "Who's on first?" Yet we must be so solemn about this book.

Trueblood says the humor of Jesus is akin to dialectics; various elements play off each other until a truth is revealed.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Trueblood, 79.

<sup>10</sup> John 4 (RSV)

<sup>11</sup> Trueblood, 53.

The Gnostics long ago portrayed Jesus as laughing. They made fun of the Old Testament, which my Hebrew Professor said has a lot of funny stories anyhow, in a way that outrages us. We Christians cannot laugh at ourselves--a trait that most psychologists point out is necessary for mental health.

Another conventionality we must overcome is an organization. Pagels points to the fact that while by 200 C.E. the church had become an institution with a three rank hierarchy with bishops, priests and deacons, Gnostics felt justified theologically to refuse to obey the bishops and the priests. Thus, this might be one of the reasons the Gnostics were rejected from the church.<sup>12</sup>

Pagels quotes Clement of Rome (Bishop at the end of the first century), who saw the need of a hierarchy, with "each man in his rank," that seemed to be based on the organization of the Roman army.<sup>13</sup>

We saw in Chapter 2 that the church fathers were outraged that the Gnostics performed all the functions of service, how they drew lots, and even women baptized! It would seem that the priesthood of all believers so extolled by the Reformation and finally accepted by Vatican II was anticipated by the Gnostics early on.

For Edward Schillebeeckx, a delegate to Vatican II, reported on Vatican II as accepting the idea of the priesthood of all believers. He wrote: "The layman is taken seriously as a Chris-

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<sup>12</sup> Pagels, xxiii, 45, 86.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 40-41; Bettenson, 31.

tian by the 'official church', in his task in both the church and the world." He wrote also that the Church is no longer identified with "The Hierarchy" and further sees the right of every person to think and live in accordance with that person's convictions.<sup>14</sup>

This sounds pretty Protestant, even Gnostic, to me.

The BEM document (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry), of which is given some detail in the previous chapter, proclaims that all people of the church are called to "confess their faith and to give account of their hope." Also, "The Holy Spirit bestows on the community diverse and complementary gifts." But, although, "the churches are agreed in their general understanding of the calling of the people of God, they differ in their understanding of how the life of the Church is to be ordered."<sup>15</sup> This is a question--how is it to be ordered?

The denomination to which I belong, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), began as a sect, a lay movement, in which the distinction between lay persons and clergy is still not acute. Lay persons serve the eucharist, preach, teach, and lead in many ways not offered in more episcopate churches. Indeed, many Disciples of Christ churches do not have an ordained minister on the staff because they do not have the money.

Another of our conventionalities is worship. Worship involves

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<sup>14</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, Vatican II: The Real Achievement (London: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 41,80.

<sup>15</sup> WCC, Baptism, 20.

many and diverse forms. Quakers do it very quietly, at least until one of them is inspired to speak. At the other end are the jumping, rolling in the aisles and "barking" characteristic at some revivals. Bach's great music, as well as the plain songs, are part of music given at worship. Baptism and eucharist are part of worship. And who is to lead? The Gnostics alternated the leadership. The leadership is ordained in many churches. And ordination itself takes many forms.

Some of the tractates from Nag Hammadi may have been used in worship. The Tree Steles of Seth may be one such example. Some of the material, such as The Prayer of the Apostle Paul or even The Gospel of Truth, might enrich our own worship.

Cardinal John Newman, who was involved in the Vatican I Council, had issued his theory in 1846, new to most Catholics of that time and not totally accepted, that:

Christian revelation was not, as was at that time so commonly thought by both Catholics and Protestants, something that was delivered once and for all and that the faithful had only to preserve unchanged. On the contrary, Christ had left the Holy Spirit to direct the church. Under the Spirit's direction the church had the power to develop and define Christian teaching to meet the new challenges and conflicts of each passing age." 16

And that spirit of Newman's is an appropriate one for our time also. Can we be bold enough to seek the guidance of that Spirit as we further seek unity? Bold enough to ask what is heresy and what is orthodox in the light of a new age? Bold enough to re-evaluate our own history in the light of new information such as

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<sup>16</sup> Hollis, 11.

that furnished by Qumran and Nag Hammadi? Bold enough to reconsider Nestorius and Arius and even Valentinus as church fathers? And what about the church mothers? What about the women leaders of those Montanists?

"All the old questions," says Pagels, "the original questions, sharply debated at the beginning of Christianity--are being reopened." These include: how is the resurrection to be understood, who was Christ, how does Christ relate to the believer, what about women's participation in the priestly and the episcopate functions of the church, how does Christianity relate to the other world religions?<sup>17</sup>

Pagels writes:

Had they been discovered 1,000 years earlier, the gnostic texts almost certainly would have been burned for their heresy. But they remained hidden until the twentieth century, when our own cultural experience has given us a new perspective on the issues they raise. Today we read them with different eyes, not merely as "madness and blasphemy" but as Christians in the first centuries experienced them --a powerful alternative to what we know as orthodox Christian tradition. Only now are we beginning to consider the questions with which they confront us.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pagels, 180.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 181.



## CHAPTER 5

## The Stereo-PolyScopic View

Edward Schillebeeckx wrote of Vatican II regarding the idea of "return" to a more "evangelical form of the Catholic Church"--in which Christians "will regard themselves and act as this Catholic Church. There will be, then, a real growing together until at length they can recognize themselves in each other--and this without in any violating either speculative or historical truth."<sup>1</sup>

If I am reading Schillebeeckx correctly, he is saying there has all along been The Church of which the individual churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have been only partial participants. And thus if this Evangelical form can be perceived, we can all grow together toward it and recognize ourselves as part of it. It sounds something like Jacqueline McMakin's discussion presented in Chapter 1 about each completing the vision of the other.

It is like a concept important to Vancouver 1983, that of a house of living stones: "The challenge before us and our churches is to be obedient to our faith, that we really become a priesthood of all believers and living stones of the whole house, dedicated to God, sharing his gifts with the whole humankind (1 Peter 2:4-5). That is what it means to be involved in a fellowship of participation."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schillebeeckx, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Gill, 54.

The passage from Peter reads: "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

This passage brings to my mind a congregational show held at a former church I belonged to. People brought the things they had created to this show--art work, furniture, one person brought the book he had had published. The items were displayed in artful ways. The total effect was beautiful. The beauty was made up of the contributions brought by each person. Sharing and participation were enhanced by being brought together. This was like the house of living stones where each person brings a contribution and each is more beautiful in a setting with that of others.

Theodore O. Wedel wrote in 1945: "Reunion will be endlessly costly. None of us as yet fully want it despite generous lip-service to ecumenical ideals. We want it on our terms, with our church still occupying the chief seats at the coming reunion feast."<sup>4</sup>

There is great truth in Wedel's observation. We do want it on our terms--United Methodists, Disciples of Christ or whoever.

In the 12th chapter of 1 Cor., St. Paul says we are all part of the body of Christ: "For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand,

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 2:4-5 (RSV).

<sup>4</sup> Theodore O. Wedel, The Coming Great Church (New York: McMillan, 1945), 3-4.

I do not belong to the body. . . ' If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."

(1 Cor. 12:14-20 RSV) <sup>5</sup>

Paul wrote out of a world view of his time, a world view going clear back to Homer, of society being composed as a body with the gods, and later God, as the head. <sup>6</sup> Paul added his own twist to this world view and said this is what the Church is: a body with inter-dependent members, organs that must function together in harmony.

"καὶ γὰρ τὸ σῶμα οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐν μέλος ἄλλὰ πολλά" were the words Paul used--"For the body is not in one member but many." <sup>7</sup>

We know the word Paul used for "many," πολλά . We know it in one of its forms as "polis." "Polis"--the word Greeks called their city states. We know it in words beginning with "poly"--meaning having many parts--as in "polyangular, polyandry," etc. as well as in such words as "metropolitan, politics, and politician." The body politic was the concept Paul was getting at. And the people to whom he wrote knew what he was saying.

We, unlike the Greeks of Paul's time, have lost the world view meaning, and the concept often falls flat. In discussing that with a friend once, I was told Paul did not refer to a real human body. But he did: with eyes, nose, hands, etc.

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 12:14-20 (RSV).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon, trans. William R. Arnt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 806-807.

<sup>7</sup> Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, trans. Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, and Kurt Aland (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), 447.

Perhaps the impact of "body" has been lost because we have such specialists for our bodies: gynecologists; obstetricians; pediatricians; eyes, ears, nose and throat doctors; dentists; cardiac specialists; endocrinologists; hairdressers, cosmeticians, and eventually morticians. From the womb to the grave, the human body is handled as if on a conveyer belt.

Well, it can be said that each organ in the body has a life of its own. The heart pumps the blood and is not greatly concerned with the functioning of the pancreas. Indeed, each organ is deeply "doing its own thing" and even selfishly so in one sense of the word. Yet, in an even more selfish sense, each organ would be advised to be much concerned about the functioning of all other organs. It is to the vested interest of the heart that the lungs function well. It is to the vested interest of the lungs that the heart and the brains function. And so on with all the organs. And there is no quarter for competition here either. The heart does not compete with the lungs, the lungs do not compete with the brains. Such would bring illness and even death.

Melos "μέλος" is the word translated as "member," meaning in Greek, as it does in English, an interlocking part of some greater whole. And polla, translated as "many," is not just any old collection of many, but a many that is a cohesive unity. Unity out of diversity--that is the idea of melos and polla as used by Paul. And the collection of melos and the polla is what the soma "body" is.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bauer, Greek-English Lexicon, 502-503, 694-695.

But then we have such discord within the Christian faith. That is why we have an ecumenical movement. So many diverse opinions exist. And indeed, as we have seen, Christians have always been a quarrelsome lot. While Constantine called Nicaea I to get everybody to agree, he did not succeed, for we are still disagreeing.

Yet, in a way, the Church has been like a body as it grows. First the egg and the sperm unite to form one cell that multiplies over and over as it hurls down the fallopian tube. In the uterus the mass attaches itself to the wall and begins to draw nourishment. At some point the cells begin to differentiate. Three main kinds of cells begin to be formed. One group of cells go off and begin to be bone cells, another to be internal organs and muscle tissue, yet another to specialize as skin cells. If this splitting up and differentiating did not occur, the new born baby would be simply a big "blob" of identical cells--no fingernails that all new mothers like to count, or eyes, or nose, or hearing or seeing, as Paul said.

The Church has been like this. Jesus compared himself to a grain of wheat and was like a sperm cell who produced with his disciples (who were very much like an egg cell) a church (at Pentecost) that multiplied into many churches. At that point these churches were very much like the multiplying cells that travel down the fallopian tube to the womb. At the Council of Nicaea the Church began to have structure, to be able to be legitimate, to draw into it the richness of the Roman Empire. At this point it was very much like the attaching of the egg cell mass to the wall of the womb where it begins to take in nourishment from its mother. The divisions

that took place at Chalcedon, in 1054, and the Reformation were something like the three kinds of divisions of the egg cells.

We need to discover new meaning of the body, the "σωμα"--soma, as an understanding of the Church. In the book, The Joy of Study, an essay, "Soma Christou"--Body of Christ--by Clarence T. Craig discusses the difficulties in knowing what Paul was really talking about. Intershuffled into Paul's theology, says Craig, are aspects of possible Gnostic elements, as well as Greek and Hebrew understandings. And there is the very complex view of Pauline expression of the resurrected body not being the same body that one dies in. The view of the Church as the Body of Christ is not a particularly New Testament image, as we might suspect from discussion noted above, but it is distinctly a Pauline one. Craig ends by saying that despite the difficulties we might have with Paul's exact meaning, it is yet one of the most valuable concepts we can hold about the true nature of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

Avery Dulles, a Catholic theologian, wrote Models of the Church in 1974. In his first chapter, Dulles referred to the fact that physicists use some common image or "model" to try to understand something quite abstract, such as comparing the behavior of light to that of billiard balls on a billiard table. He said that a "unified field theory"--a term from physics--in theology would account for all experiences of Christians and would therefore be

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<sup>9</sup> Clarence T. Craig, "Soma Christou," The Joy of Study, ed. Sherman E. Johnson (New York: MacMillan, 1951), 73-85.

a complete model if it could be constructed.<sup>10</sup>

Since Vatican II, Dulles says, the model of Body of Christ for the Church has been supplanted by three other models: People of God, Sacrament, and Servant. He goes on to discuss these models: Institution, Communion, Sacrament, Herald, and Servant. Dulles calls for tolerance for pluristic models because much harm can be, has been, done by the attempting to define the Church in any one particular model.<sup>11</sup>

Dulles, in a chapter dealing with ecumenism, relates that some theologians feel that the Church is really a unity not realized, that what is really needed is not for Christians to effect some new formula or merger for whatever pragmatic reasons may exist for that, but to make a discovery of the oneness that has existed all along and that we simply need to become conscious about.<sup>12</sup> His statement sounds somewhat like that of Schillebeeckx that began this chapter.

Stereo-PolyScopic View is a model of a sort. Admittedly, this is a phrase I put together as explained in Chapter 1 with the possibility of a kind of seeing produced from many viewpoints and made "solid" in a manner of perception. Thus, here is the suggestion of seeing from the viewpoints of all the demoninations. But more, it is a way of seeing from all the past that we have lived through.

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<sup>10</sup> Avery Dulles, Models of the Church (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 21-26.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 27-30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 138.

In the work of the psychologist Piaget was the observation that children of different ages perceive in different ways. Younger children see volumes of liquid, lengths of pencils or sticks, and shapes in different ways than older children. The same might go for our species as a whole. As the species matures, we may see differently in ways than we do now.

There is a "blind spot" in our eyes. We can see this by looking at an object first with one eye and then the other. Yet the brain fills in this gap so that we do not go through our days with "holes" in what we look at. This invisible gap could cause an accident perhaps in some situation. In the business of seeing "Stereo-PolyScopically" perhaps Gnosticism fills that gap. For Gnosticism "lurks" just beyond our vision. We fail to see what is Gnostic about the concept of church, of eucharist, baptism, even of Heaven and Hell.

Perhaps it is a matter of practice, as seeing itself in the young takes practice. And practice becomes related to understanding and tolerance.

But the wider issue is how do we turn the fact of symbols into some reality. Light is not billiard balls. Nor is the church a house of stones.

If seeing is the criterion, we are at the edge of doing so. Schillebeeckx talks of the churches seeing themselves in one another. McMakin talks of each completing the vision of the other. Robinson expresses the need of seeing differently.

This may have been where Nicaea I went wrong. If the delegates there could have "completed" each others' visions, church history



could have taken another course.

Dialogue is what is at issue. Dialogue at Vancouver 1983 was defined as "that encounter where people holding different claims about ultimate reality can meet and explore these claims in a context of mutual respect." <sup>13</sup>

Dialogue, of course, is a frightening thing, upon first approach. But as Nairobi 1975 said: "Dialogue, far from being a temptation to syncretism, is a safeguard against it, because in dialogue we get to know one another's faith in depth. One's own faith is tested and refined and sharpened thereby. The real test of faith is faith-in-relation." <sup>14</sup>

Both of the definitions just presented are related to the dialogue between Christian faith and other religions. But if we can have dialogue with other faiths and learn from them, why not also learn from our various sectors of Christian faith, including Gnosticism?

And we need to enter into dialogue, not just to be tolerant, but to avail ourselves of needed insight. Every person's eyes and ears are eyes and ears that we can learn from. While a teacher of second grade Sunday School, I had a lifting experience one Sunday morning. We were exploring how the world seems to blind persons. As part of the exercise we were to shut our eyes and listen as blind people must in order to perceive a world out of that darkness.

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<sup>13</sup> Gill, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Paton, 72.

We listened. For once, a group of second graders were silent enough to hear a pin drop. We heard the sounds coming from other Sunday School classes, the laughter, talking, singing, the ripple of a piano. We shared what we had heard. One little girl said, "I hear an airplane." I had not heard that. But as I listened more intently I too heard the throb of an airplane going overhead. Having trusted her ears enough, I was rewarded by a more pronounced hold on reality itself.

The symbol of the house of living stones comes to mind again. At Vancouver, Philip Potter enlarged upon this symbol by saying that by becoming living the believers are not isolated anymore, nor dead, but made alive by the Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

There is a feeling of a holographic image here as one meditates upon it. The writer of 1 Peter must have imaged this house of stones most vividly. It is a compelling concept for us today.

The House of living stones has its divisions. However we see it, the diversity of the poly need the firming together of the melos, the members. The many becoming one and the one becoming many were themes Gnosticism dealt with as we saw in Chapter 2.

So often our divisions cause the oppression of Christian against Christian. Does this make sense? The exploitations of South America, Africa, Asia--how much of this is Christian oppressing Christian in all the areas of economic, political, racial, sexual, and class injustice? When the Lactogen nursing formula issue was being demonstrated against, how much of this issue was Christians victimizing Christians? And so it does.

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<sup>15</sup> Gill, 195.

To achieve a Stereo-PolyScopic view of Christian unity, with all churches sharing that which is unique with them, can only be done in the realm of understanding, of going beyond tolerance to achieving a delight in our various differences. For we must learn to appreciate, instead of fearing, our differences. As Gene Roddenberry, the creator of "Star Trek," has said, we need to take delight, not just be tolerant, but go beyond even that and take active delight, in our differences and see them as beautiful. The symbol, the IDIC, Infinite Diversity in Infinite Creation, on "Star Trek," means that the joy of creation is in its infinite diversity and in the ways our differences combine to give it meaning.

It will not be easy, it will be costly, as Wedel said, but it will probably be delightful. For we have yet to discover what unity can mean--we have no truly common core of understanding if we include in our own individual understanding an expansion to what others can add. The Faith itself is Open, hopefully to God's guidance!

## CHAPTER 6

## Conclusions on Christian Unity

Hardly anyone would argue against the need for Christian unity. Even the followers of Glass and Paisley who picket the World Council of Churches are not demonstrating against Christian unity per se-- but against what they see as a gathering of the Anti-Christ.

But Christian unity is more than a nice idea. It is thought Constantine enstated Christian faith in favor in the empire as a "glue" to hold together what was therefore a crumbling state. Today we need some glue also.

We are like the scattered pieces of light that the Gnostic Redeemer came to get all together again. And if any one of us is the true light, why then that means all of us are.

We have existed all along as one, as Dulles said. But like a mind coming back from amnesia, to rediscover its own memories, we must rediscover ourselves.

It is no longer we and they--we are all we.

As we trace ourselves as a community of faith, we need to pick up the pieces of ourselves we have lost. Even back to Gnosticism.

So, could we come to a Great Ecumenical Council and share? We each bring a piece of the whole. We made a start with the BEM.

One useful model is that of Church Women United. This organization of women have worked together for the needs they find at hand in the spirit of helping poor and oppressed in the same kind

of spirit that the WCC seeks. Denominational lines do not give problems. There is sharing of customs, as well.

The World Council of Churches came out of the 1910 Edinburgh Conference as a result of the need to cope with the "scramble" for mission fields. The mission needs remain as we need to cooperate to deal with hunger, housing, disease, etc., in the world.

Paul A. Crow, Jr., in Christian Unity: Matrix for Mission, relates how as a child in Alabama, the preaching and singing of ecumenical faith was still in a context where the churches had no real communication with other churches. "Unity is confessed, but division is accepted as normal and diversity is misunderstood."<sup>1</sup>

Walter Marshall Horton perhaps has the best statement about unity: that Ecumenism is a prophetic stance. He enjoins that this stance needs to extend out of the "achieved unity" of the WCC, but also to extend outward "to a more inclusive unity" where such can be detected.<sup>2</sup>

Crow says that just as unity is a gift from God, so is diversity. He speaks of the "colorful array" of cultures, languages, races, etc. "All are hues in the spectrum we call the people of God," he says.<sup>3</sup> It sounds like the IDIC of "Star Trek" or Stereo-PolyScepticism.

We have come full circle. Unity will only come with work.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul A. Crow, Jr., Christian Unity: Matrix For Mission (New York: Friendship, 1982), 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Marshall Horton, Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach (New York: Harper, 1958), 9-10.

<sup>3</sup>Crow, Ibid.

### Epilogue: Reflections on a Personal Visit to Vancouver 1983

In early summer of 1983 there were those of us who were going to the Vancouver Assembly. We were going to take part in a seminary class that was to be part of the Bellingham Forum, which was to be based on Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington.

I flew up to Seattle, lost my luggage and finally found this glorious bus that fellow Bellingham participants were taking.

Interspliced with the excitement of going to The World Council of Churches was the loveliness of Bellingham and Western Washington University. My dormitory room overlooked the waters of the sound and up beyond that I could see the mountains of Canada.

We went to the opening worship in the large Pacific Coliseum with about 15,000 people. We saw the picketers of Glass and of Paisley--to one of whom I said that I was glad we were all up there together. It made a greater diversity to the gathering.

The following day we journeyed to the campus of the University of British Columbia--a beautiful campus of tall trees and rose gardens overlooking the waters of the Pacific.

I spent a lot of my time in Vancouver angry. At the picketers, at the attitude others had of the picketers. At the women--for I felt they said too much too late. At the attitudes about the poor that I felt the WCC sentimentalized. The poor need great help by those who are willing to get dirty, discouraged, mistreated and misunderstood; as well as patient and long-suffering.

I was angry at the criticism of the United States. The U.S. is not the Big Ugly. One of the most interesting presentations I went to was put on by the Indians of British Columbia who had taken out a law suit against the Queen. Their trees had been cut, the game killed, and their way of life destroyed. Not a word about the United States. It tells you something about me, that I felt relieved at not hearing anything about the U.S. The Queen was the Big Ugly here.

The big revelation to me was that, as much as I in these pages, push for the Stereo-PolyScopic and dialogues, I found how tiresome and provoking all that is. No wonder the councils of the past had personal fighting in the chambers. It is not an easy job to listen, to hear about feelings we do not want to hear about.

We listened to presentations in the Bellingham Forum about what issues were going on in Vancouver. Thus we were really a part of those things going on in the WCC. Philip Potter visited us in Bellingham. Some of us got his autograph.

The highlights were all the different people we got to meet and talk to. They were from many places in the U.S. and from other nations. This line of church councils going back to Nicaea itself I found now were more meaningful.

I have already talked to a travel agent about going to the next meeting of the WCC in Canberra, Australia.

### Appendix: Chronology of the Twenty-One Ecumenical Councils

1. First Council of Nicaea, May 20 to July 25 (?), 325. Pope Sylvester I, 314-35. Nicene Creed against Arius: the Son consubstantial with the Father. Twenty canons.
2. First Council of Constantinople, May to July 381. Pope Damasus I, 366-84. Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Four canons.
3. Council of Ephesus: five sessions, June 22 to July 17, 431. Pope Celestine I, 422-32. Mary, the Mother of God against Nestorius. Six canons.
4. Council of Chalcedon: seventeen sessions, October 8 to November 1, 451. Pope Leo I, the Great, 440-61. Two natures in the one person of Christ. Twenty-eight canons.
5. Second Council of Constantinople: eight sessions, May 5 to June 2, 553. Pope Vigilius, 537-55. Condemnation of the "Three Chapters" of the Nestorians.
6. Third Council of Constantinople: sixteen sessions, November 7, 680 to September 16, 681 (in Trullo). Pope Agatho, 678-81; Pope Leo II, 682-3. Condemnation of the doctrine of one will in Christ (Monothelism); Question of Honorius.
7. Second Council of Nicaea: eight sessions, September 24 to October 23, 787. Pope Hadrian I, 772-95. Meaning and lawfulness of the veneration of images. Twenty canons.
8. Fourth Council of Constantinople: ten sessions, October 5 869 to February 28, 870. Pope Nicholas I, 856-67; Hadrian II 867-72. Termination of the schism of Patriarch Photius. Twenty-seven canons.
9. First Lateran Council, March 18 to April 6, 1123. Pope Callistus II, 1119-24. Confirmation of the Concordat of Worms. Twenty-five canons.
10. Second Lateran Council, April 1139. Pope Innocent, 1130-43. Schism of Anacletus II. Thirty canons.
11. Third Lateran Council, three sessions, March 5 to 19 (or 22), 1179. Pope Alexander III, 1159-81. Twenty-seven chapters, two-thirds majority for papal election.



12. Fourth Lateran Council: three sessions, November 11-30, 1215. Pope Innocent III, 1198-1216. Seventy chapters; Profession of faith against the Cathari; change of substance in the Eucharist; annual confession and communion.
13. First Council of Lyons; three sessions, June 28 to July 17, 1245. Pope Innocent IV, 1243-54. Deposition of the Emperor Frederick II. Twenty-two chapters.
14. Second Council of Lyons. Six sessions, May to July, 1274. Pope Gregory X, 1271-76. Rules for conclave, union with Greeks, crusade. Thirty-one chapters.
15. Council of Vienna: three sessions, October 16, 1311 to May 6, 1312. Pope Clement V, 1305-14. Suppression of the Order of the Templars. Controversy over Franciscan poverty. Reform decrees.
16. Council of Constance; forty-five sessions, November 5, 1414 to April 22, 1418. Termination of the Great Schism; resignation of the Roman Pope Gregory XII, (1405-15) on July 4, 1415; deposition of the conciliar Pope John XXIII (1410-15) on May 29, 1415; deposition of the Avignon Pope, Benedict XIII (1394-1415) on July 26, 1417. Election of Martin V, November 11, 1417. Condemnation of John Hus. Decree Sacro-sancta on the superiority of the Council over the Pope and decree Frequens on the periodicity of the councils. Concordats conciliar nations.
17. Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence: at Basel twenty-five sessions, July 23, 1431 to May 7, 1437. Translation to Ferrara by Eugenius IV (1431-47) on September 18, 1437, finally on January 1, 1438; from there to Florence, January 16, 1439. Union with the Greeks, July 6, 1439, with the Armenians, November 22, 1439, with the Jacobites, February 4, 1442. Translation to Rome April 25, 1442.
18. Fifth Lateran Council: twelve sessions, May 10, 1512 to March 16, 1517. Pope Julius II, (1503-13); Leo X (1513-21). Against the schismatic Council of Pisa 1511 to 1512. Reform decrees.
19. Council of Trent: twenty-five sessions, December 13, 1545 to December 4, 1563, in three periods: sessions 1-8 at Trent 1545-47; sessions 9-11. at Bologna, 1547, all under Pope Paul III, (1534-49); sessions 12-16 again at Trent 1551-52, under Pope Julius III, (1550-55); sessions 17-25 at Trent under Pope Pius IV (1559-65). Doctrine of Scripture and Tradition, Original Sin and Justification, Sacraments and Sacrifice of the Mass, Veneration of the Saints, reform decrees.

20. First Council of the Vatican: four sessions, December 8, 1869 to July 18, 1870. Pope Pius IX, (1846-78). Definitions of Catholic doctrines, the Pope's primacy and his infallibility.
21. Second Council of the Vatican: four sessions, October 2, 1962 to December 8, 1965. Pope John XXIII, (1958-63); Pope Paul IV (1963-78). Christian unity.

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Sources: Hubert Jedin, Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1960). 251-254.

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